

**DONOR MOTIVATIONS AND DECISION MAKING:  
UNDERSTANDING THE MAJOR GIFT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FROM A  
DONOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

A Dissertation

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Higher education is faced with a challenge to its traditional funding structure. As a result, academic programs must seek alternative sources of support. Chief among these sources is philanthropy in the form of major gifts. Insight into donor motivations and decision making when approached to consider a major gift may help to maximize the success of university development efforts. This study attempted to explore the effectiveness of the major gift development process at institutions of higher education by examining said process from the perspective of the donor. Subjects of the study included eleven donors to the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University who gave at a level of \$50,000 or higher. The project utilized semi-structured interviewing as a primary qualitative method for collecting data. Content analysis was utilized to analyze data. Results revealed major findings in the following major categories: why and where donors give, the giving process and factors that influence decision making. Implications of this study indicate that donors to higher education have a pre-existing inclination to give, view the ability to develop personal relationships based on trust as a vital prerequisite to giving, can be influenced by information and education by development officers, are more likely to give if they have the opportunity to be personally involved in the program, and are ultimately influenced by how the total process makes them feel.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Background and Rationale

#### Statement of the Problem

Higher education has long enjoyed financial support in the form of state funding. However, higher education competes with several other social programs, including K-12 education, for this finite resource. In *The Kindness of Strangers: Philanthropy and Higher Education*, Elliott (2006) argues that when cuts in public funding must be made, higher education is the logical choice because “unlike other social institutions, higher education has potential for generating its own income and for coping with lost revenue” (p. 9).

Higher education has historically been viewed as a public good. Hensley, Galilee-Belfer and Lee (2013) explore the concept of this higher good, stating:

In the United States, universities are traditionally dedicated to providing students a traditional, liberal arts core while ensuring that upon graduation students possess professional skills directly applicable to the workplace – both for the students’ own good, and for the good of said workplace. Finally, institutions must be value-added for individual students while also adept at connecting that value to broader social ends (p. 553).

The same authors suggest that decreasing state funding has raised scrutiny about whether higher education should, in fact, be considered a public good. “Funding cuts have increasingly pushed the costs of education onto students and their families, in essence forcing a conversation about who derives the most benefits – or good – from higher education: individuals or society” (Hensley et al., 2013, p. 554). East, Stokes and Walker (2014) offer a

similar perspective from the United Kingdom, highlighting the global nature of many issues facing higher education. East et al. (2014) explain that while “definitions of public good are contested and the role of higher education is unclear” (p. 1617), moving beyond a purely economic view of the concept of public good reopens the possibility to explore how the development of individuals can impact society. Carnoy, Froumin, Loyalka and Tilak (2014) contribute to the public good discussion by exploring how the balance of public versus private interests served by higher education can change over time, as can the perceptions of this balance. Specifically, Carnoy et al. (2014) suggest that this balance is “mediated by the state” (p. 359) and both affects and is affected by state funding. As public perception shifts to the idea that higher education primarily serves private interests, it is more difficult to justify state support for higher education as a public good. Thus, the argument for higher education as serving private rather than public good makes it an easy target for decreased state funding in comparison to many other state-funded programs.

As such, an increased demand for public funding combined with political pressures for maintaining low tax rates have entrenched higher education in an era of decreasing state support. Further, many states restrict increases in tuition, leaving public universities with lowered potential for generating new income. Some scholars recognize this funding crisis as reaching its peak within that past five years, and explain that “large decreases in government funding [are] causing colleges to exhaust resources, reduce or eliminate program offerings, and decrease faculty complements” (Stephenson, 2014, p. 176).

Faced with this challenge to the traditional funding structure, institutions of higher education are seeking alternative sources of support. Indeed, academic programs are increasingly “expected to find their own sources of financial support or to supplement

institutional support” (Elliott, 2006, p. 5). In light of these financial woes, many institutions of higher education have turned to philanthropy as an increasingly important source of funding.

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE, 2011) – founded in 1974 – boasts more than 3,400 educational institutions and 64,000 “advancement professionals” in its membership, evidence of the trend toward and emphasis on fundraising and philanthropy in higher education (CASE, 2011). According to a survey conducted by Commonfund and the National Association of College and University Business Officers, more than fifty American colleges and universities had endowments valued over \$1 billion in 2010, with the largest being Harvard University’s \$27.5+ billion endowment (Inside Higher Ed, 2011).

There are multiple strategies available to universities for developing charitable support. Chief among these strategies for universities is major gift development. According to Weinstein (2009), “major gift fundraising is the most cost-effective resource development strategy” available to fundraisers (p. 131). Major gift development costs less per dollar raised than alternative fundraising strategies such as those commonly found in annual giving, planned giving or capital campaigns (Weinstein, 2009, p. 39). Weinstein (2009) emphasizes the importance of relationship building and a personalized approach to major gift development. Indeed, major gift development officers employed by universities generally employ relationship building as a vital component of their practice in fundraising.

While philanthropy represents a vital source of funding for higher education, some contend that philanthropy does not replace shortages of operating funds because donors “favor conspicuous and name-able things, like buildings and scholarships” over operating



budgets which support existing programs (Dad, 2011). Others take issue with athletic fundraising, asserting that it “is a competitor for funds that ought to be going to teaching and learning” (Potter, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study will be to examine the major gift development process from the perspective of the donor in order to develop a better understanding of donor motivations and decision making related to major gifts and the effectiveness of the major gift development process and its various components. While there is a generally accepted process for major gift development, this process is not grounded in study. A more complete understanding of the major gift development process from the perspective of the donor, grounded in study, may help future fundraising efforts to be more effective in bridging important funding gaps for institutions of higher education, as well as make clear the importance of further research in the area of major gift development.

### **Significance of the Study**

Despite the growing importance of fundraising at universities, little research is available which explores motivations and decision making of major gift donors or the effectiveness of major gift fundraising strategies from the perspective of the donor. Indeed, while scholars such as Weinstein (2009) point to the cost-effectiveness of the major gift development process in comparison to other development strategies, research fails to address whether the generally accepted major gift development process is itself effective. Stated differently, the practice of major gift development is not grounded in theory. Further, major gift development in the university setting is not grounded in theory which addresses

considerations or characteristics of these institutions, nor the unique attributes of donors who give to these institutions or to particular programs within these institutions.

Dean (1998) recognized more than a decade ago that major gift donors are not necessarily the same population of donors that participate in annual giving. The major gift donor represents an important source of security for higher education institutions, and their existing and expanding programs. And yet, current literature does not adequately help us further our understanding of this group of donors. Without a complete understanding of major gift donors, goals for working with donors to direct giving to support existing academic programming cannot be addressed.

Drezner (2014) calls attention to the lack of scholarly publications related to fundraising in *Fundraising and Institutional Advancement: Theory, Practice, and New Paradigms*. Despite the fact that many doctoral students address fundraising in their dissertations, only ten percent of these dissertations result in journal articles (Drezner, 2014, p. 107). Drezner (2014) speculates this is related to the high percentage of said doctoral students who pursue practice rather than faculty positions. As a result, the practice of development continues to advance with little to no connection to theory. Development officers continue to work within a process about which little research has been published, and without an idea of which of their efforts are most effective.

The increasing significance of philanthropic support for higher education makes a thorough and thoughtful understanding of the development process from the perspective of potential donors vital. Insight into donor motivations and decision making when approached to consider a major gift may help to maximize the success of university development efforts. Further, it may provide valuable awareness of effective ways to develop support for existing

academic programs, which could have far-reaching impacts for universities as traditional sources of funding continue to decrease.

### **Research Questions**

Given the growing importance of philanthropic support to higher education, and the resulting need to develop an understanding of the major gift development process that is grounded in theory and study, this dissertation will address the major gift development process and its effectiveness from the perspective of the donor. In order to do so, a study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of a potential major gift donor, what motivated them to consider giving to an institution of higher education?
2. How did interactions with major gift development officers affect their decision to give?
3. What were the specific strategies or approaches implemented by major gift development officers which affected their decision to give?
4. Were there factors other than interactions with major gift development officers that affected their decision to give?
5. Ultimately, what were the primary reasons they chose to give, and to give at a certain level?

### **Definition of Terms**

Annual Giving – Annual giving refers to gifts that do not meet the threshold for qualifying as a major gift, and are typically secured through direct mailings or telephone solicitations.

Bequest – Gifts given through wills and trust agreements which enable people to provide long-term financial security for their families and loved ones while also supporting a charitable institution (Weinstein, 2009, p. 233).

Capital Campaigns – Capital campaigns are multi-year fundraising efforts that place an emphasis on visionary capital projects. These efforts typically include a silent phase of fundraising prior to the announcement of the capital campaign and its goals (Weinstein, 2009, p. 46).

Charitable Remainder Trust – A charitable remainder trust allows a donor to transfer assets to a trust and receive income for life (Weinstein, 2009, p. 236).

Cultivation – The portion of the major gift development process where a relationship is built between a prospective donor and the charitable institution.

Current Gifts – Current gifts maximize the immediate benefit for a charity, and may provide tax benefits to the donor. Such gifts include cash, checks, securities, real estate, life insurance policies and personal property (Weinstein, 2009, p. 232).

Fundraising – The act of raising funds for a non-profit organization. Fundraising strategies commonly include annual giving strategies, such as direct mail campaigns; planned giving; capital campaigns; and major gift development (Weinstein, 2009, p. 39).

Fundraising is commonly used interchangeably with development.

Gift Annuity – A gift annuity agreement is a legal contract between donor and charitable organization which provides that in exchange for a gift, the charitable organization will pay the donor or designated beneficiary a fixed amount annually for life (Weinstein, 2009, p. 235).

Identification – The portion of the major gift development process where individuals who may have the capacity and propensity to give to an organization are identified.

Major Gift Development Officer – A development professional whose primary role is to cultivate major gifts for an organization.

Major Gift Development – Major gift development includes the identification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship of a donor, and is considered the most cost effective fundraising strategy (Weinstein, 2009, p. 131). Many institutions have a minimum dollar amount for a donation to be considered a major gift.

Planned Giving – Planned giving is a non-current gift which utilizes a giving vehicle such as a bequest or annuity to allow the donor to accommodate a gift as a part of their end of life planning.

Solicitation – The portion of the major gift development process where the prospective donor is asked to make a gift to the organization. Solicitation is commonly referred to as the ask.

Stewardship – The portion of the major gift development process where the relationship development between the donor and the charitable organization is continued following the acquisition of a gift.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In order to appreciate donor motivations and decision-making, it is important to explore the various concepts that frame the topic of philanthropy. The use of a single theory to frame this study would be inadequate, as it would risk eliminating the consideration of the multiple possible motivational concepts related to philanthropy. Philanthropic research is informed by theories in several fields, including economics, psychology and sociology. Sulek

(2009) suggested that the definition of philanthropy has evolved and is “a term that now defines, in part, an emerging field of scholarly discourse” (p. 193).

Much of the existing literature exploring philanthropy and donor motivations is based on concepts related to altruism and volunteerism (Drezner, 2011). In *Giving: Charity and Philanthropy in History*, Bremner (1994) stated that “philanthropy has been translated in a variety of ways: as a loving human disposition, loving kindness, love of mankind, charity, fostering mortal man, championing mankind, and helping people”. Indeed, philanthropy can be viewed broadly as giving, whether of resources through charitable giving, time through volunteering, or through other types of service (Bies, 2012). The existence of various motivational factors that drive philanthropic giving, such as altruism, social philosophy and values, is supported by various scholars. Vesterlund suggested that “giving decisions are often guided by social norms and rules” (Powell, 2006, p. 576,). Frumkin (2002) contended that individuals are driven “to enact their values, faith and commitments through work, prayer, philanthropy and volunteerism” (p. 96).

Not all scholars agree that altruism and philanthropy are free of self-serving motivations. Drezner (2011) suggested that philanthropy is often based on mutual benefit, a combination of altruism and self-interest. “Debate continues about whether ‘true altruism’ exists,” stated Drezner (2011, p. 48). Drezner (2011) went on to explain that there is a spectrum ranging from self-serving behavior to altruistic behavior. Gifts given in order to receive recognition fall on the self-serving end of the spectrum. Gifts given for mutual benefit may exist in the middle of the spectrum. However, Drezner (2011) contended that even gifts that appear to be given out of purely altruistic motives “likely still derive some personal benefit” for the donor, such as self worth (p. 48).

Drezner (2011) extended this view of mutual benefit to the concept of volunteerism. He explained that in the case of volunteerism, the mutual benefit is more clearly defined.

Drezner (2011) stated:

Volunteers seek personal growth through wanting to join a group of colleagues or aspirational peers professionally and in social networks, to learn or enhance a skill, or even to assuage guilt. Again, the level of egoistic motives compared with altruistic intentions varies in each individual and with regard to the situation as well (p. 48). Certainly, the benefits that volunteers stand to gain are well acknowledged, and commonly used as basis for good volunteer management strategies.

Drezner's perspective is reinforced by a review of altruism literature by Piliavin and Charng (1990), which suggested that "anything that appears to be motivated by a concern for someone else's needs will, under closer scrutiny, prove to have ulterior selfish motives" (p. 28). Much research related to altruism indeed focuses on the combined factors of "intentions and the amount of benefit or cost to the actor" (Piliavin, 1990, p. 29).

This view of cost and benefit in philanthropy is further framed by social exchange theory. Ritzer and Goodman (2004) explained that the concept of costs and rewards as a part of social exchange is based in rational choice theory. Drezner's (2011) interpretation of social exchange theory related to philanthropy focused on the social recognition and benefits that one receives in return for giving to an organization. He suggested that social exchange theory is closely related to the concept of relationship marketing relevant to fundraising. Drezner (2011) explained that "relationship marketing is the idea of establishing long-term relationships with alumni to maintain their loyalty, involvement, and donations" (p. 52).

Drezner (2011) explored additional economic concepts related to philanthropy. One such concept was that of the public good. In this context, he offered that donors would be motivated by “altruistic concern to maximize the public good among others” (Drezner, 2011, p. 49). For some donors, the ability to maximize gift impact is important. These motivations are grounded in another economic theory, which Drezner (2011) referred to as “venture philanthropy” (p. 52). In this case, donors evaluate the impact, or return, that they can expect from their gift, or investment.

Irrespective of motivations, Sulek (2009) proposed that philanthropy be understood “as the application of private means to public ends” (p. 201). Such a definition undoubtedly applies to major gifts to higher education, and it is the concepts of altruism, volunteerism and philanthropy that will be used to frame this exploration of donor motivations and decision-making.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### History of Philanthropy in Higher Education

Philanthropy has played a role in American higher education since its beginnings. Indeed, as Kirp (2003) stated, “dollars have always greased the wheels of American higher education; were it otherwise, the term ‘legacy’ would not have a meaning specific to universities” (p. 3). In *Philanthropy and Fundraising in American Higher Education*, Drezner (2011) suggested that philanthropy has been the single most influential factor in shaping American higher education. Drezner (2011) examined British support during the founding of American higher education in the colonies. He suggested that England provided the only realistic source of philanthropic funding for American institutions at that time, and that giving to higher education was aligned with the spirit of charitable donation that was pervasive in British culture (Drezner, 2011). After the American Revolution, philanthropic support for colonial institutions was provided primarily from citizens of the colonies. Though gifts were generally quite small, Drezner (2011) suggested that their prevalence indicated a view by the colonists that education was a public good, and its support through charitable giving was aligned with the ideals of colonial America.

Rudolph (1990) painted a similar picture of the financial beginnings of American higher education. Rudolph (1990) suggested that “the American college, when open, was often on the verge of bankruptcy” (p. 177). He concurred that early philanthropic support of American higher education came from wealthy individuals in England (Rudolph, 1990). Rudolph (1990) explained that charitable giving was consistent with “the sense of stewardship nurtured by the Christian denominations” in England, and that it was this same

sense of stewardship that led those living in America to continue private support of higher education (p. 178). Thelin (2004) agreed with Rudolph's assessment that religious beliefs supported early American higher education philanthropy. He explained that "devout donors in England who may not have been specifically interested in endowing a college were nevertheless intrigued by the prospects of missionary work among the Native Americans" (Thelin, 2004, p. 15). Thelin (2004) suggested that American higher education institutions utilized philanthropic dollars designated for the education of American Indians for other purposes, including education of students who intended to work in missionaries (p. 16). This assertion that educational institutions utilized gifted dollars for purposes other than what the donor intended is reminiscent of modern challenges university foundations face when donor intentions do not match university needs.

Rudolph (1990) shared that American higher education enjoyed a growth in philanthropic support following the Civil War (p. 189). Indeed, Thelin (2004) explained that philanthropy played a role in shaping the direction of American higher education throughout its history. He pointed to the role of support from the Carnegie Foundation in creating universal standards for higher education in the United States in the time between the two World Wars (Thelin, 2004, p. 238). Thelin (2004) described how philanthropy began to play a role in external funding of research following World War II (p. 282).

Romano, Gallagher and Shugart (2010) echoed Drezner and Rudolph's sentiments regarding the philanthropic founding of American higher education. The authors began their article by providing historical information on philanthropy's role in American higher education, and shared the importance of philanthropy in supporting the nation's early private and public institutions (Romano et al., 2010). They also highlighted the emphasis that was

placed on scientific research in the twentieth-century, noting that philanthropy reached peak levels during this time (Romano et al., 2010). The authors argued that throughout history, access has been an important priority in higher education, and that private giving has helped to support that mission (Romano et al., 2010). They argued that this is particularly apparent in community colleges, where the commitment to access is realized through open admission practices (Romano et al., 2010).

Drezner (2011) also explored the historical pattern of individual donor influence on higher education. He contended that influence by individual donors has always existed, and often contrasts with institutional commitments to academic freedom and shared governance (Drezner, 2011). Drezner (2011) offered examples of individual donors influencing the direction of curriculum through endowed chairs, and even the direction of practical application of knowledge through the formation of teachers' colleges. He contended that donors also shaped the direction of higher education in America by establishing new institutions that focused on higher education for women and minorities (Drezner, 2011). Drezner (2011) shared that the twentieth century ushered in a major change in giving to higher education. Institutions shifted from being the recipients of major gifts from the wealthiest citizens to actively seeking support from alumni. This change contributed to the professionalization of the field of fundraising and the organization of development efforts in higher education. Drezner (2011) went so far as to propose that higher education in America exists in its current form because of the influence and support of philanthropy.

### **Modern Philanthropy in Higher Education**

Understanding the history of philanthropy in higher education prepares us to explore the role of philanthropy in higher education today. In *The Kindness of Strangers*:

*Philanthropy and Higher Education*, Elliot (2006) touched on some issues related to higher education, and the role that philanthropy plays. Elliot (2006) proposed that a true understanding of the current issues involved with higher education fundraising can only be reached through an understanding of the changes in higher education institutions in society. Specifically, Elliot (2006) felt that the major issues facing and changes occurring in higher education include: a shift toward mass education in the twentieth century, increasing costs, the view of higher education as a public good in need of governmental funding, competition for governmental funds, the difficulty of measuring success in higher education, greater reliance on external funding, and the characteristics of modern philanthropists.

One of Elliot's (2006) primary concerns related to higher education philanthropy was that organizations may struggle with gift restrictions that do not match organizational needs or goals. Elliot (2006) contended that organizations should accept gifts with conditions only if those conditions align with the organization's mission (p. 4). Elliot (2006) further argued that decisions and gifts that are not aligned with the mission of the institution erode the public trust in the institution. Elliot (2006) proposed that a dependency on donated funds makes institutions more likely to allow donors to insert themselves into the operations or academic affairs of the institution. She also suggested that promoting donor interests over institutional interests hurts institutional credibility, and that reliance on donated funds does not necessitate relinquishing control to the donors (Elliot, 2006). In *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line*, Kirp (2003) also asserted that reliance on donated funds puts the educational mission at risk. Kirp (2003) stated that "priorities in higher education are determined less by the institution itself than by multiple 'constituencies' – students, donors, corporations, politicians" (p. 4). Kirp (2003) suggested that directing the institutional mission

and activities should be the responsibility of administration such as university presidents. However, he argued that today's university presidents prioritize fundraising over leadership (Kirp, 2003).

Jones (2014) raised additional concerns about higher education's dependency on charitable giving, and the ethical grey area that arises when gifts are accepted from corporations with questionable moral or ethical histories. Jones (2014) stated:

Questions have been raised both inside and outside of academe about universities and researchers accepting funding from morally contentious sources or from sources that place significant and problematic constraints upon the university or researchers in question. In examining these controversies, one might wonder if it is ever morally permissible to take money from "tainted" sources like a tobacco company, an oil company, or a pharmaceutical company, as all of these funding sources have been called into question as morally contentious. And even if a funding source is untarnished, so to speak, its monetary support could still be morally questionable if the constraints imposed by the source are problematic. In other words, money can be seen as dirty if either the source is disreputable or if the source attaches problematic constraints to the acceptance of the funding (p. 192).

Jones (2014) pointed to undue influence and coercion as major risks associated with dependence on donated monies.

Holmes (2010) shared additional concerns regarding problems that arise out of dependency on philanthropic support. He began his article with the assertion that institutions of higher education have become increasingly dependent on philanthropy as a source of funding, and suggested that the formation of foundations to direct philanthropic efforts has

arisen from said dependence on charitable giving (Holmes, 2010). Holmes (2010) proposed that institutions with foundations become increasingly dependent on the services that they provide in seeking outside funding. Much in the way that Drezner (2011) commented on the professionalization of fundraising, Holmes (2010) described foundations as a formalization of fundraising efforts, and explains that specific factors make foundations attractive to institutions and donors alike. These factors include 501(c)(3) status and autonomy from state regulations to which higher education institutions are typically subject, including open records requirements.

Capeloto (2015) explored how freedom of information laws complicate the relationship between universities and foundations. She highlighted multiple instances where foundations were ultimately required to make records public because they were tied to funding or activities in the university. In cases where foundations intend to keep information private to accommodate donor requests for anonymity, the complex relationships that exist with universities may result in situations that are harmful to foundation relationships with donors. Further, Capeloto (2015) pointed out that while foundations might have once been utilized as places to hide university spending that was unscrupulous, such arrangements are drawing increased scrutiny and are not always safe from open records requirements.

As university foundations became commonplace, Holmes (2010) observed, many institutions developed multiple foundations to service various disciplines or departments. Alternatively, institutions such as the Texas A&M Foundation hire multiple development specialists that are assigned to work with specific colleges or units. Further, universities may also establish separate foundations to address different types of giving. This is the case at Texas A&M, where the Texas A&M Foundation works with major gifts and planned giving,

the Association of Former Students focuses on annual giving, and the 12<sup>th</sup> Man Foundation is responsible for athletic giving.

While fundraising plays a vital role in financing higher education, Holmes (2010) suggested that the cost of fundraising efforts is the limiting factor in the success of foundations. He explained that the return realized from the investment in fundraising efforts is most often delayed (Holmes, 2010). Holmes (2010) stated that support for fundraising efforts largely is provided by the institution, with additional support coming from sources such as unrestricted gifts, management fees, gift fees, temporary investment earnings, revenues from real estate, and other sources. Holmes (2010) stated that determining the nature of the relationship of the foundation to the institution is important, and suggested that that relationship might be dependent, interdependent or independent. Holmes (2010) concluded his article by contending that investment in fundraising efforts will never be satisfactory because the amount of philanthropic support received from those efforts will never be enough for the institution.

A related challenge of university fundraising efforts was highlighted by Thelin (2004), who suggested that these organizations face the problem reconciling the messages of successful capital campaigns with continued financial need. When fundraising efforts are effective, it becomes difficult for stakeholders to understand why an institution might still be underfunded. Thelin (2004) suggested this problem is exacerbated by noncurrent giving (p. 359). Noncurrent gifts are accounted for in total dollars raised, but are funds that cannot be utilized by the institution until a future date.

Despite concerns related to philanthropy in higher education, many scholars recognized its importance in bridging funding gaps. Romano *et al* (2010) argued that

philanthropy can make a difference in students' ability to afford and be successful in higher education. To support this argument, the authors observed that the burden of funding education has shifted to students and their families, and that student debt loads are increasing (Romano et al., 2010). They argued that a shift to merit-based aid from need-based aid will have a disproportionately negative effect on poor and minority students (Romano et al., 2010). The authors pointed out that students who receive grants have higher success rates, and proposed that philanthropic support can help to bridge the funding gap that currently exists by providing scholarships to support student success (Romano et al., 2010).

The necessity of philanthropy as an alternative funding source has become a reality outside of the United States higher education system, as well. A 2012 article discussed the growing exploration of philanthropic support for higher education in Europe (Perez-Esparrells). The authors stated that “university funding is beginning to change, with more emphasis on private streams, which have led many European universities to introduce fundraising strategies” (Perez-Esparrells, 2012, p. 55). The authors contended that European institutions lag behind their American counterparts in regard to the professionalization of the field as well as the strategy with which fundraising efforts are undertaken. “Generally speaking,” the authors stated, “European society lacks experience in the fundraising field, just the opposite to what is happening in the United States, hence most universities in Europe face internal and external difficulties to develop both, a strategy and a structure to fundraise” (Perez-Esparrells, 2012, p. 56). The authors pointed to the success of America’s strategic incorporation of fundraising into institutional culture, and specifically into “tradition, core philosophy and values” (Perez-Esparrells, 2012, p. 56).



## **The Fundraising Professional**

While Drezner and others described the professionalization of fundraising and the expansion of the university foundation, additional authors further explored the role of the development professional. Caboni (2012) addressed the need for an articulated code of conduct for development professionals, suggesting that the profession has historically operated with “great latitude in the approaches they use to solicit individuals” (p. 41). Caboni (2012) explored the potential conflict of interest that arises because development professionals are beholden to two clients, namely the institution for which they are raising funds and the donors from whom they are soliciting gifts. Caboni (2012) suggested that while development professionals are generally expected to “regulate their own behavior and the behavior of their colleagues” (p. 41), the potential exists to cause harm to the institution in a variety of ways, such as misrepresenting the institution or accepting gifts with goals or restrictions that are not in keeping with the institutional mission. Similarly, development professionals can create a detrimental situation for the donor by, among other things, failing to maintain requested anonymity or by structuring gifts in a way that causes financial strain for the donor (Caboni, 2012). Caboni (2012) suggested that an era of increased reliance on philanthropic support necessitates the formation of a code of conduct for development professionals. In lieu of a formal code of conduct for the profession, Caboni (2012) suggested that institutions develop their own codes of conduct for their development professionals.

Indeed, Caboni highlighted an important concern, and touched on only a few of the myriad ways in which a development officer might err in terms of professional conduct. Development professionals are under considerable pressure to perform in a way that results in significant donations to the institution that they represent. In order to do so, they work

diligently to develop close relationships with potential donors. The potential to blur the line between professional and personal interactions most certainly exists. In a pilot study conducted in 2012, major gift development officers at Texas A&M University were interviewed regarding the major gift development process. Multiple development officers referenced the difficulty they frequently had with ensuring that relationships with potential donors stayed primarily professional, and did not stray too far into friendship. One development officer commented that they “constantly have to remember to keep that friendship line drawn.”

In an effort to address concerns related to code of conduct, and “to assure that philanthropy merits the respect and trust of the general public, and that donors and prospective donors can have full confidence in the not-for-profit organizations and causes they are asked to support,” the Association of Fundraising Professionals published a document entitled “A Donor Bill of Rights” (Appendix B). This document outlines ten expectations that a donor should have relevant to development professional conduct, including the expectation of professional relationships and interactions with development professionals, the right to reasonable privacy and anonymity, and the right to honest and prompt responses to donor inquiries. The Association of Fundraising Professionals also supports a code of conduct for its members. However, as Caboni (2012) indicated, these standards are not necessarily adopted nor enforced outside of that membership association. Nonetheless, many institutions, including the Texas A&M Foundation, have their own guidelines for development professional conduct in place (C. Carrigan, personal communication, September 7, 2015).

While development is considered a professionalized field, development professionals frequently identify as professionals or experts from other professions who work in development (Daly, 2013). Daly (2013) observed that development professionals “bring expertise and skills” from other professional experiences to their role in fundraising (p. 27). In the previously referenced pilot study conducted at Texas A&M University in 2012, one major gift development officer stated, “Almost everybody I know fell into development. I know very few people who actually said, ‘I’m going to be a fundraiser.’” This view of development officers as hybrid professionals who incorporate fundraising with skills from other roles and professions is supported by Drezner (2014), who suggested that development efforts must be championed by a leader who is close to the institution and program, and who takes on development as part of a multi-faceted role in program leadership.

### **The Development Process**

Drezner (2014) suggested that the development profession operates largely on best practices, which are insufficient substitutes for practice that is grounded in theory. While some literature discussed addresses factors related to development as a profession, little literature exists which addresses development as a process. An article published in 1998 addressing the changing dynamics of development suggested that successful development must “follow a series of steps including: identification, information, interest, involvement, internalization, investment, immortalization” (Dean, p. 12). In more current publications, many authors make reference to an “across the board approach to major gift fundraising” (Daly, 2013, p. 26), which includes some incarnation of identification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship. Drezner (2011) highlighted the importance of relationship-building strategies in major gift development, stating:

Building relationships between the institution and its current and prospective donors is arguably the most important aspect of successful solicitation of the largest or (leadership) gifts. In the past, fundraising offices relied on transaction-based marketing. In other words, each year donors were asked to give, and a series of one-time transactions took place. Relationship marketing changes fundraising strategy from a series of one-time transactions to a focus on the donor's lifetime giving (p. 53).

In many cases, the major gift development process is self-identified by development professionals and is not supported by literature or study, as was the case in a pilot study conducted at Texas A&M University in 2012 which explored gender as a factor in major gift development from the perspective of the development officer. Many of the findings addressed the major gift development process itself. Development officers typically approach major gift development as a multi-step process. First, development officers identify individuals who may have the capacity and/or propensity to give. Second, development officers build a relationship with the prospective donor. Next, the development officer will make the ask, proposing to the prospective donor that they make a gift to the institution. Typically, the ask is accompanied by specific information related to the amount of the proposed gift and what it will support. If the gift is secured, the development officer moves into the final stage of the major gift development process: stewardship. Stewardship includes working to fulfill any deliverables that the institution is responsible for, including specific benefits or recognition included in a gift agreement with the donor. Stewardship also involves continuing to foster the relationship the development officer has built with the donor. Stewardship might be more simply viewed as thank you and follow up.

In an interesting study by Chung-Hoon, Hite and Hite (2005), fundraising professionals at three universities were interviewed regarding the development of relationships with donors. Among other factors, participants reported that donor trust, frequency of contact and the expression of appreciation from the institution were impactful in positive donor relations (Chung-Hoon et al., 2005, p. 48). These findings were echoed in the aforementioned pilot study conducted at Texas A&M in 2012. It should be noted that in both cases this information was reported by development professionals, and did not include a donor perspective. While it does provide a valid development officer perspective, this study does not speak to the effectiveness of the major gift development process from the perspective of the individual making the decisions: the donor. Indeed, the effectiveness of the generally accepted major gift development process, as well as a view of the process from the perspective of the donor, is conspicuously absent from current literature.

Yet another aspect of development that is a standard practice unsupported by study is the use of metrics to evaluate development officer effectiveness. Many foundations, including the Texas A&M Foundation, frequently utilize metrics that include measures such as the number of personal contacts a development officer makes with a prospective donor in order to assess development professional performance (C. Carrigan, personal communication, August 5, 2015). Not only is this practice unsupported by scholarly research, findings of this study suggest that such metrics are an ineffective indicator of development officer success.

### **Donor Profiles**

Scholars point to multiple characteristics that affect an individual's likelihood to give, as well as giving behavior. Stephenson and Bell (2014) highlighted "age, income,

participation, satisfaction, and perceived prestige” (p. 177) as important factors affecting charitable giving. These and other factors not only play a role in level of giving, but in gift structure and donor behavior.

### **Alumni Giving**

Drezner (2011) suggested that creating engaged alumni is vital to the success of development in higher education. Indeed, Okunade, Wunnava and Walsh (1994) suggested that factors such as major and club involvement impact alumni giving behavior. But Drezner (2011) contended that creating engaged alumni must begin with a focus on how people learn to become philanthropic, and referred to research that shows people learn to be generous through development and moral reasoning. This research stated that in children, being generous results from a directive to do so. As individuals age, reinforcement of being generous is generated from peer feedback and internalization of praise. These factors develop into “a sense of moral obligation” (p. 66) as the individual matures (Drezner, 2011). Drezner (2011) continued by suggesting that involving students in fundraising practices will increase their propensity to donate as alumni. He pointed to literature that suggested that students need to be socialized to giving (Drezner, 2011). Further, Drezner (2011) shared literature that supported the importance of young alumni giving, even if it is in small amounts. Drezner (2011) encouraged student affairs departments to work closely with development offices to increase exposure of students to fundraising activities, thus increasing their understanding of philanthropy. Stephenson and Bell (2014) suggested that student involvement increases the likelihood of giving as alumni, as does “overall satisfaction with the college experience” (p. 178). In their study, which utilized quantitative methodology and a survey as a data

collection tool, Stephenson and Bell (2014) found that the majority of surveyed alumni donors identified their alumni status as the reason they gave.

A study by Lara and Johnson (2014) provided econometric evidence that marital status, income, age and gender are impactful factors in predicting alumni giving behavior. While the authors indicated that some results, such as the finding that “alumni with more relatives who attended the same institution give more predictably and more generously” (Lara, 2014, p. 303), were expected, others were not. The authors reported “surprising results about some other factors: for example, alums who live farther from campus are more likely to give, and give more generously” (Lara, 2014, p. 303).

Even in university systems in other countries, alumni giving appears to be affected by similar elements as their American counterparts. Belfield and Beney (2000) explored factors that have an impact on alumni giving in the UK through an empirical study. The authors concluded that factors such as gender, income, campaign type and major all impacted the level of giving of alumni (Belfield, 2000). They pointed to areas in need of additional research, such as ways to identify donors and encourage larger gifts, as well as whether pursuing donors with a giving history is more successful than pursuing new donors (Belfield, 2000).

Drezner (2011) also touched on social identity, stating that individuals who identify themselves in terms of an organization (i.e., “I am an Aggie.”) are more likely to support said institution. However, when departments within an organization compete for support from the same individual, the likelihood that they will donate decreases. Drezner (2011) stated that students who are highly involved in activities are more likely to donate as alumni.

Additionally, he suggested that a greater investment in alumni relations by an institution will increase the likelihood of alumni giving (Drezner, 2011).

This concept of identifying with an institution is supported by a study conducted by Merchant, Ford and Rose (2009) that explored the effects of personal nostalgia on giving. The authors proposed that personal nostalgia creates an emotional tie to a charity and promotes donor giving (Merchant et al., 2009). They found through the study that personal nostalgia does increase likelihood of giving by donors, primarily through connecting to a specific phase or experience of the donor's life or by creating an emotional tie to the charity (Merchant et al., 2009). Similarly, Sargeant, West and Ford (2001) found that previous experiences with an organization, benefits received and quality of service all have the potential to impact donor decision-making.

Wastyn (2009) identified "positive feelings toward their alma mater [and] good college experiences" (p. 100) as common among alumni who gave, and feelings that their college experience was "a stop in their day or a service for which they paid an agreed-upon price" (p. 103) as common among alumni who didn't give. It should be noted that among the studies cited in the literature review, Wastyn's (2009) was one of few that implemented naturalistic methodology, utilizing purposeful sampling, interviews, content analysis and case study reporting. This methodology was employed in order to "uncover underlying motivations for not giving" (Wastyn, 2009, p. 99). Indeed, the thoughtful and appropriate application of a methodology that was well suited to address the research questions makes Wastyn's findings more impactful in the scope of understanding motivations and decision making of donors, or non donors in this case, than the myriad empirical studies also referenced in this literature review. Wastyn's study was undertaken not for the purpose of



developing a predictive model of behavior, but rather for developing an understanding of behavior.

In an interesting exploration of methods for building a culture of alumni giving, Pottick, Giordano and Chirico (2015) present a case study of student philanthropy. In this case, graduate students in a particular program were challenged by university administrators to support future graduate students through philanthropic giving. The study revealed that participation rates and gift amounts increased over the three years that the program was implemented, and that many student donors continued to give in the year after graduation (Pottick et al., 2015, p. 207). What makes this study so interesting is that it was presented in the context of rising student loan debt and the shifting burden of the cost of higher education from state to student. To address this issue, university administrators sought charitable donations from the very students burdened with the increased costs of education. Unsurprisingly, average gift sizes reached only \$43.21 in the year following graduation, which was ultimately the most successful year of the program (Pottick et al., 2015, p. 207).

### **Passion Giving & Venture Philanthropists**

Elliot (2006) also explored characteristics of the modern donor, stating that there is a shift away from loyalty giving and from middle-aged white male alumni as the primary donor pool (p. 36). Nichols (2003) supported Elliot's suggestion, stating that a shift toward affinity fundraising is occurring. What Nichols (2003) calls affinity fundraising has been referred to alternatively as passion giving, and requires that donors and fundraisers explore ideas that are of personal importance or interest to the donor. Boverini (2006) agreed, stating that "new donors give to issues... They like values-driven organizations with values woven into their mission" (p. 88). Nichols (2003) suggested that nonprofit organizations that do not

recognize this paradigm shift in fundraising will ultimately fail.

Other scholars agreed with Elliot's (2006) suggestion that the donor base is continuing to become comprised of a lower percentage of alumni, and pointed to a new type of donor: the venture philanthropist. Venture philanthropists are so named because of their seeming affinity for investing in a cause and their desire to achieve impact that can be evidenced through measurable outcomes (Boverini, 2006). An article in *Development & Alumni Relations Report* (2007) stated that these "new philanthropists are channeling their money toward programs with high social impact and seeking little public recognition" (p. 7). These modern philanthropists tend to give "not just money but their time and experience" (Boverini, 2006, p. 86), and "want acceptance of their ideas and opinions, not just their money" (p. 88).

Additional authors pointed to distinctions between the traditional loyalty donor and the modern venture philanthropist by highlighting the modern donor's desire to maintain close involvement with the organization to which they are giving. Illustrating this point, Boverini (2006) highlighted four primary characteristics of venture philanthropists:

First of all, a close relationship between investor and investee is essential. Second, venture philanthropy requires a long-term commitment between donor and institution. These relationships often last between three and seven years... Third, venture philanthropists seek to strengthen the organization to meet its mission. Therefore, they focus on organizational capacity and infrastructure building, working on improving an organization's potential for lasting success. Finally, venture philanthropists seek to measure both the means and the ends of their contribution. This means that the social return on investment has become something that is

measured and evaluated as an outcome of philanthropy (p. 85-86).

The close and long-term relationship that Boverini (2006) pointed to can manifest in donors becoming involved in an advisory capacity for strategic planning or as part of a board (p. 93). Venture philanthropists not only expect to remain engaged with the organizations to which they give, but they expect those organizations to reflect that same spirit of involvement when it comes to the delivery and impact of the programs or services they provide. Strickland (2007), who referred to the new model of giving as transformational giving, explained that “transformational gifts involve extensive engagement with the donor and expectations that the institutions will engage a community (or social challenge) beyond the campus” (p. 109). Strickland (2007) proposed that the relationship between the transformational donor and higher education is a partnership, both in terms of the gift and in impact.

Venture philanthropists don’t fit the mold of the traditional donor in terms of giving style or profile. As Boverini (2006) explained,

...new philanthropists do not fit a common mold. They are the cyber and venture capital rich, women, ethnic and racial groups previously underrepresented or unrecognized in philanthropy, and those who have become wealthy through the intergenerational transfer of trillions of dollars over the recent years. New donors may be young, middle-aged, or older, and they may come from a tradition of giving or from a culture and tradition where giving is new (p. 88).

Fransen (2007) discussed the businesslike approach of venture philanthropists. He suggested that these philanthropists have an interest in utilizing their giving to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education, stating that the “truly systemic change” (Fransen, 2007, p. 151) they desire “will require a different kind of effort, rather than

working away at the problem from the outside” (p. 151). Not only do venture philanthropists seek to affect systemic change, but systems must change in order to attract such philanthropists. “To meet the demands of such philanthropists... such programs will need to be developed in a businesslike way that the new generation of wealthy individuals can appreciate” (Fransen, 2007, p. 151). Indeed, venture philanthropists, much like their namesake venture capitalists, are seeking to invest in organizations with sound vision and practices. Fransen (2007) explained “philanthropists today are looking for individuals with the vision and entrepreneurial ability to propose answers and implement strategies” (p. 152), and “think of their philanthropy in terms of investing, not charity” (p. 152).

Boyce (2013) voiced concerns about the level of influence this new, highly involved breed of donors might wield over higher education. Boyce (2013) conceded the growing importance of philanthropic support of higher education in the face of declining state funding, but suggested “reduction in state funding further empowers well-endowed philanthropists... [who] lack both scholarly and practical experience in education and yet seek to influence educational policy and reform through their giving” (p. 257). Boyce (2013) seemed to approach venture philanthropy with significant cynicism, essentially suggesting that donors have been awaiting an opportunity to exert undue influence on higher education, stating:

...venture philanthropists view their funding as a way to influence higher education by using their donations to gain entryways into that work. These venture philanthropists have used the globalized economy to amass extraordinary wealth and seek to not only increase profit but also to influence our educational systems. These donors are “pushing for privatization of public education, creating new markets worth

hundreds of billions of dollars as well as for the prerogative to direct how public tax dollars get spent” (p. 258).

Bernstein (2013) referenced similar concerns about the influence and political agendas of big donors and venture philanthropists, but suggested another concern that venture philanthropists’ business-oriented model was a poor fit for higher education. She explained that the expectations of venture philanthropists, which include “quick, measurable results” (Bernstein, 2013, p. 121), were unlikely to be met by a faculty driven system that is “multilayered, with more checks and balances” (p. 121) than private industry.

In contrast, Boverini (2006) was optimistic about the potential of a growing donor base of venture philanthropists, stating “the opportunities for the academy to harness the resources and know-how of these new donors are abundant, provided that higher education is willing to open the doors necessary to collaboration with this type of philanthropist” (p. 89). Boverini (2006) further highlighted the benefits of investing in long term relationships with venture philanthropists by pointing to the potential for repeat giving by individuals who are invested in an organization over several years, rather than in the capacity of a one-time gift (p. 93).

### **Gender and Donor Behavior**

Despite his focus on alumni giving, Drezner (2011) acknowledged that most of the theoretical framework upon which philanthropic research is based is centered on white male donors, and does not account for diversity among the donor base. Drezner (2011) explored philanthropic characteristics of populations that are not historically thought of as donors. He stated that in the traditional view, donors are wealthy, white, educated leaders or businessmen (Drezner, 2011). He contended that recent literature shows that donors exist

outside of this traditional view, and that a better understanding of female donors and non-white donors is warranted (Drezner, 2011).

Drezner (2011) suggested that despite the traditional view of philanthropists as white males, women represent an increasingly significant portion of the donor pool. Historically, women supported higher education through donation of homemade goods, and through monetary donations to begin women's schools (Drezner, 2011). He suggested that increased earning potential, longer lifespan as compared to men, and the transfer of wealth are all factors that continue to increase women's role in philanthropy (Drezner, 2011). Drezner (2011) explored literature related to giving by women, and admits among the small amount of literature that exists the conclusions are inconsistent. Nonetheless, the author pointed to research that suggests women are more empathetic, and that empathy increases giving (Drezner, 2011). He also stated that women tend to volunteer more than men, and that women tend to give monetarily to the organizations with which they volunteer (Drezner, 2011). Drezner (2011) suggested that this is due to a developing a connection with the organization, and emphasized the importance of this fact for developing strategies to court female donors.

Much of the literature available on gender differences in donors to higher education comes to us from studies on athletic donors. Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) asserted that an understanding of donor behavior based on gender is increasingly important as institutions rely more heavily on charitable contributions and as the purchasing power of women increases. Additionally, the authors stated that because of greater longevity, women are more likely to manage the estate of a deceased spouse than are men (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). The results of their study indicated that there was difference between male and female donors

to athletic programs in terms of involvement, contribution amount, donor longevity, and annual income (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). Staurowksy (1996) found that female athletic donors tend to be younger and make smaller donations than men. Additionally, female donors are more likely to support women's athletic programs than are male donors, and altruistic motivations play a larger role in their decision making (Staurowksy, 1996).

Tsiotsou (2006) found that female athletic donors were less motivated by personal contacts, professional contacts, priority seating and tax deductions than male donors, though the order of importance was the same for both genders. Tsiotsou (2006) also reported that women donated on average 3.5 times less on an annual basis than male donors. While this information is certainly interesting, it does not necessarily speak to the motivations or decision making of non-athletic donors to higher education. Athletic giving is typically recognized through specific and tangible benefits, such as premium seating or parking at athletic events. Benefits for non-athletic donors are largely intangible.

Drezner (2011) also touched on giving among married couples, and found that when women are the decision makers, education tends to benefit from more support than when men are the decision makers. Next the author proposed that women tend to give smaller amounts to more organizations, while men are more likely to give larger gifts to fewer organizations (Drezner, 2011). Finally, Drezner (2011) pointed to literature that suggests women give smaller gifts with greater regularity than men, who tend to make infrequent and larger gifts. Drezner (2011) suggested that more research is necessary to understand female donor behavior, and that such an understanding will become only more important as women's philanthropic and economic power grows.

Mesch and Pactor (Tempel, 2011) agreed that women tend to approach philanthropy differently than men. The authors suggested that differences in social expectations and upbringing affect women's philanthropic motivations and goals (Tempel, 2011, p. 163). They contended that women place "more emphasis on relationships and taking care of individuals" whereas "men tend to prefer more nonrelational acts" (Tempel, 2011, p. 163). They identified women as more likely to volunteer, as well as more likely to be involved after making a gifting decision (Tempel, 2011). The authors noted that this tendency toward engagement with an organization increases the likelihood that the donor will be "loyal and generous" (Tempel, 2011, p. 163), which supports Drezner's similar observations.

Gender differences in giving were also found in a study that examined donors to university performing arts programs. Kim, Gibson and Ko (2011) reported that there were differences in motivation between male and female donors. Specifically, female donors were more motivated by civic and education concerns and community and university support (Gibson et al., 2011). Additionally, the authors found that there were differences in motivation among age groups, with donors over sixty-five being more motivated by civic and education concerns and community and university support than younger donors (Gibson et al., 2011).

Kottasz (2004) reported differences between male and female donors in a study that explored the behavior of young donors. The objective of the study was to provide empirical data regarding the behavior of young donors, as well as the differences between male and female donor behavior. Among other differences, Kottasz (2004) concluded that male donors were more likely to be concerned with the benefits available to them in return for a donation, while female donors were more concerned with helping particular groups and receiving



feedback from those groups. This suggests that men would be more likely to make gifts with self-serving motivations, while women might be considered more altruistic donors.

This suggestion is supported by the conclusions of a previous study by Kottasz (2003) that explored the motivations of young male professionals for donating. Kottasz (2003) drew from a population of young male professionals working in a large metropolitan area and explored their motivations for and behavior relating to charitable giving. The author concluded that young male professionals constitute a unique segment of the donor population, and are primarily motivated by the social rewards of donating (Kottasz, 2003). Kottasz (2003) suggested that this group prefers donating to established organizations with good reputations, and that they are not particularly interested in planned giving.

Conversely, a study by Taylor and Kaminski (1996) concluded that female donors respond more favorably to a partnership approach to fundraising, rather than being identified as a target and asked for a donation. The authors suggested that women do not like solicitations based on pressure or competition (Taylor & Kaminski, 1996). They asserted that women are attracted to the idea of affecting change, and that an organization would be well-served to educate the female donor about how their support can make a difference for the institution (Taylor & Kaminski, 1996).

### **Ethnicity and Donor Behavior**

Wagner (Tempel, 2011) explored ethnicity and its impact on philanthropic behavior. She suggested that the major challenge for fundraisers is to move away from a “one size fits all” (p. 184) fundraising model and toward a more personalized approach. Indeed, “diverse groups have identifiable, valuable, and significant philanthropic characteristics and traits”

(Tempel, 2011, p. 184). These traits affect which fundraising strategies are effective with specific populations, and which are not.

Drezner (2011) also pointed to research that suggests that race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status do not exclude the possibility of philanthropy, and continues to explore giving in the African American, Latino, Asian American and Native American communities. Drezner (2011) stated that most African American giving is focused on “racial uplift” (p. 29), and is focused on the community. Giving to churches is the predominant form of philanthropy among African American communities, but an emphasis on giving to education is seen in younger generations. He shared literature that suggests African Americans with a college education are more likely to give than any other peer group (Drezner, 2011). The literature also stated that African Americans dedicate a larger portion of their income to charity than other racial groups. However, African Americans are not heavily pursued as higher education donors. Drezner (2011) suggested that strategies that include working with the community and church to help members of the African American community understand how their giving to higher education could impact their community could make a significant difference in securing support from African American donors.

In exploring giving by Latinos, Drezner (2011) suggested that much of their charitable giving is not counted because it occurs outside of traditional non-profits. Specifically, the author pointed to “fictive kin networks” (Drezner, 2011, p. 36) where Latinos send money to extended family networks. Drezner (2011) contended that because Latinos often come from countries where services such as education and health care are not dependent on charitable donations, their tendency to support these institutions in the United States is low. Latino communities, like African American communities, tend to focus their

charitable dollars on churches. Drezner (2011) also pointed to distrust of large organizations as a reason for low giving to higher education by Latinos.

Regarding Asian American communities, Drezner (2011) again suggested that familial giving is a priority, and even considered a responsibility. Nonetheless, younger generations are placing a greater emphasis on giving to education. However, their interest is typically more focused on immediate action and needs as opposed to long term investments such as endowments (Drezner, 2011).

Finally, Drezner (2011) touched on the American Indian community. He stated that American Indian populations are among the lowest income communities in the United States (Drezner, 2011). Within their communities, giving exists in a system of bartering and exchange. Drezner (2011) suggested that a broader view of philanthropists be adopted, but that it be informed by an understanding of varying cultural traditions and attitudes toward philanthropy.

### **Generational Differences in Giving**

Drezner (2011) also explored the differences in giving between generations, suggesting that Generation X is significantly less likely to give than the prewar generations. He stated that little information exists about the monetary generosity of Millennials, but that they are recognized as a generation of volunteers (Drezner, 2011). Drezner (2011) emphasized the importance of teaching young people that anyone can be generous, even if they are not wealthy.

In *Achieving Excellence in Fundraising*, Brown and Kou (Tempel, 2011) identified four generations of givers: Before Boomers, Boomers, Generation X and Millennials (p. 200). The youngest two generations - Generation X and Millennials - account for twice as

many \$75k+ households as Before Boomers, and nearly two-thirds as many as the Boomers (Tempel, 2011, p. 200). The authors pointed out that giving tends to be affected by lifecycle (assumed to be comparable across generations) and cohort (generation-specific events) effects (Tempel, 2011, p. 201). Okunade et al. (1994) suggested an examination of age-giving profile of the donor versus life-cycle profile. They collected information on donors from a major university in the United States and found that the size of gifts tended to grow until the donor reached the age of 52 (Okunade et al., 1994).

Brown and Kou (Tempel, 2011) also shed light on average gift size by household for various types of giving by Before Boomers, Boomers, Generation X and Millennials (p. 203). Before Boomers had the highest percentage of households participating in overall giving, as well as the largest average overall gift size. Meanwhile, Boomers had the largest average gift per household to religious giving, though a higher percentage of Before Boomer households participated in religious giving. Millennials had the lowest household participation in all types of giving reported, as well as the lowest average gift size of the generations (Tempel, 2011, p. 203). This supported Drezner's (2011) observation that Millennials are the least philanthropically active generation.

Sargeant et al. (2006) also published findings related to giving by the baby boomers. The authors suggested that the anticipated passing of the baby-boomer generation presents organizations with an opportunity to increase their bequest donations. They conducted an empirical study to explore the motivations of donors who make planned gifts in their wills. Sargeant et al. (2006) found that pledgers are most likely to be female, be living alone and have no children. The study also suggested that median annual gifts of non-pledgers were

higher than pledgers, perhaps suggesting that pledgers make contributions to fewer organizations or that their assets are not largely held in cash (Sargeant et al., 2006).

### **Impact of Net Worth & Income Level**

Heil and Bate (Tempel, 2011) also examined characteristics of high-net-worth donors. Unsurprisingly, they identified Boomers as “the largest and wealthiest economic force” in American history (Tempel, 2011, p. 173). The authors stated that by 2015, “Boomers are predicted to control nearly 60 percent of the country’s net wealth” (Tempel, 2011, p. 173.) Drawing from current literature, Heil and Bate (Tempel, 2011) contended that fundraising efforts directed at high-net-worth donors should be “donor-centric” (p. 173) and take into consideration three characteristics of this donor segment: the tendency toward family-based giving, the likely involvement of financial advisors, and high performance expectations for the nonprofits to which they donate. Suggestions made by the authors for motivating high-net-worth donors fell very much in line with the major gift development process, and include identification of prospects, evaluating areas of potential interest, educating and engaging the prospects, and exploring various gifting vehicles (Tempel, 2011, pp. 177-180).

Additional scholars suggest that income level not only affects the likelihood of giving, but also motivations for giving. The *Corporate Philanthropy* Report (2009) referred to a study conducted at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University which explored assumptions about variances in charitable giving. The study suggested that cultural values were historically viewed as having great influence on a donor’s decision making, but that income and education are factors that play a greater role in donor behavior. The study found that motivations differed among groups with different income levels as follows:

Among lower-income donors (income less than \$50,000), the phrases that resonated

as a motivation for giving were helping “to meet basic needs” or “helping the poor help themselves.” Helping the poor was the most popular giving motivator, with nearly one in five respondents citing it as their most important reason for giving. Donors with income between \$50,000 and \$100,000 were more likely than donors in either higher or lower income groups to say that they gave to “make the world better.” This was the second most common reason for giving, with 17 percent citing it. Among donors with income of \$100,000 or more, the phrases selected as motivations for giving included “those with more should help those with less” or “making my community better.”

The report suggested that the conclusions drawn from the study should encourage organizations to seek a greater understanding of their donors’ motivations.

Hughes and Luksetich (2008) contended that it is not just level of income that impacts charitable giving, variability of income. The authors conducted an empirical study of donors, and concluded that variability in income has a negative effect on donations, even among high net-worth donors. Additionally, the authors concluded that greater wealth tends to positively affect donations, but that greater debt also has a positive effect on donations.

A better understanding of donor motivations and behaviors is called for by all of the scholars referenced. Scholars who have addressed the topic have utilized various methodologies, but the vast majority of publications on the subject employ quantitative methodologies. As an example, Sargeant (1990) proposed that a model of inputs and outputs be developed to predict donor behavior. While dissertations and theses exist that employ naturalistic methodologies, as Drezner (2014) recognized, few have resulted in scholarly articles. Therefore, little naturalistic inquiry exists in a way that contributes to the theory and

foundation of the topic of donor motivations and decision-making, and specifically higher education donor motivations and decision-making. The next section of this paper will address the research questions that guided this study, as well as the methodologies that were determined to be most suitable to answer these questions.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **Research Objectives & Questions**

The growing significance of philanthropy as a source of support for higher education has made developing an understanding grounded in study of the major gift development process from the perspective of the donor a necessity. The better understanding of the major gift development process grounded in study can help to move practice forward by making major gift development more efficient, effective, and perhaps directed more specifically to supporting existing funding gaps.

In order to develop an understanding of the effectiveness of the development process from the perspective of potential donors, this dissertation will address the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of a potential major gift donor, what motivated them to consider giving to an institution of higher education?
2. How did interactions with major gift development officers affect their decision to give?
3. What were the specific strategies or approaches implemented by major gift development officers which affected their decision to give?
4. Were there factors other than interactions with major gift development officers that affected their decision to give?
5. Ultimately, what were the primary reasons they chose to give, and to give at a certain level?



## Methodology

### Research Design

The project design was informed by the naturalistic paradigm. Regarding the nature of reality, the naturalistic paradigm suggests that there are “multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 37). Additional axioms that are central to the naturalistic paradigm include interaction between the researcher and the subject, the goal of developing hypotheses which are case-specific, and the value-laden nature of inquiry (Lincoln, 1985, pp. 37-38). More specifically, naturalistic inquiry is described as value-laden in that it is influenced by the inquirer and choices that the inquirer makes in regard to the paradigm, theory and context which shape the inquiry (Lincoln, 1985, p. 38). In the case of this study, the naturalistic inquiry characteristics of natural setting, human instrument, utilization of tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, emergent design, and case study reporting all influenced the course of the research (Lincoln, 1985, p. 39-41).

It was the nature of the research questions, as stated in the previous section, which dictated the use of naturalistic inquiry methodology for this study. Prior to deciding what methodology is appropriate for a particular study, the researcher must consider what they are asking. Calabrese (2006) explains that “research questions are the basis for the appropriate research strategy employed in the study” and “dictate the methodology used” (p. 9). Calabrese (2006) references Clark *et al* (1977), contending that the questions being asked “create a link between your conceptual or theoretical framework and the research design” (p. 10). Research questions are a particularly important part of naturalistic studies, where emergent design is a prominent feature. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that, as a part of

naturalistic inquiry, emergent design allows “the research design to emerge... because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately” (p. 41). Research questions may be modified as a result of emergent design, and can also serve as an important reference point for a researcher in determining the direction of the study and deciding what data that has been collected is important (E. Gonzalez, personal communication, October 2012).

Essentially, methodology is “the operational blueprint which the inquirer will follow in completing [the] proposed study” (Clark, 1977, p. F-1). The methodology chosen by the researcher should be the most logically equipped to answer the researcher’s questions, and collect the data needed to do so, and “their adequacy or inadequacy will determine the success of the project” (Clark, 1977, p. F-1). Some methodologies are simply not well suited to answer certain questions. Coomer (1984) explains that empirical inquiry is unable to address questions that require an understanding of value, worth or meaning. Likewise, naturalistic inquiry is an inappropriate choice for answering questions related to cause and effect (Coomer, 1984).

Put simply, alternative methodologies were ill equipped to substantially address the guiding questions for this study. As an illustration, I will revisit a study by Stephenson and Bell (2014) referenced in the literature review. In this study, researchers utilized quantitative methodology and a survey data collection tool to assess why alumni give, and why they don’t. In the survey, respondents were asked why they choose to give, and were offered nine close-ended options and one open-ended option of “other” (Stephenson, 2014, p. 186). Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that they gave because they were alumni (Stephenson, 2014, p. 181). I would suggest that response does not adequately answer the research

question, nor did their chosen methodology allow the researchers the opportunity to ask follow up questions to further explore the respondents' true motivations. The same research question can be presented in a study guided by naturalistic inquiry, and can yield further results exploring deeper motivations such as feelings of obligation, gratitude, and wanting to belong or remain connected to their alma mater. Alternatively, a model of inputs and outputs to determine and predict donor behavior, as suggested by Sargeant (1990), further limits the nuance and exploration of the study of motivations and behavior. It is the flexibility of the interview setting, coupled with emergent design, which makes naturalistic inquiry best equipped to uncover more meaningful data, and thus more impactful results.

In this study, subjects included eleven individuals who were approached as potential major gift donors by development officers or program leaders associated with the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University and gave at a level of \$50,000 or higher. Participants were purposefully chosen to represent varied giving outcomes, as well as to represent both genders. Purposeful sampling seeks to accomplish an exploration of typical cases, a sampling concept developed by Patton and explored by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 102). Further, Erlandson (1993) includes purposive sampling as a method to support transferability. For the purposes of transferability an explanation of the sampling method could be viewed as a part of the thick description. In this study, typical cases were sought in order to avoid cases which may have been rejected as deviant. Typical cases for this study were defined as individuals who were identified, cultivated and asked to give a major gift by a development officer or program leader.

## **Data Collection**

The project utilized semi-structured interviewing as a primary qualitative method for collecting data. Merriam suggests that a semi-structured interview includes a mix of more and less structured questions, that the questions are used flexibly, that there is no predetermined wording or order, and that the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of issues to be explored (2009, p. 89). Interviews were loosely steered by a list of several questions (Appendix A), but relied largely on interviewees' responses to guide further questioning. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), a format that is not strictly structured allows for both questions and responses to be generated by the interviewee, allowing the interviewer to explore areas they may not previously have known to be relevant (p. 269). The use of open-ended and interpretive questions were utilized to confirm my understanding of the interviewees' responses and "offer an opportunity for yet more information, opinions and feelings to be revealed" (Merriam, 2009, p. 98). Research questions were continually revisited to ensure relevance, and were modified as a part of emergent design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that, as a part of naturalistic inquiry, emergent design allows "the research design to emerge... because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately" (p. 41). Field notes were used as the source for transcripts. Data was collected via participant interviews until data saturation was reached.

In naturalistic inquiry, the researcher is the research instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that humans are "imperfect instruments" (p. 106), and as such it is nearly impossible to eliminate researcher bias. Indeed, they argue that instead of eliminating a researcher's bias, there are "compelling reasons for conducting inquiry in ways that

maximize” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 107) the researcher’s tacit knowledge and adaptability. In order to maintain a reasonable balance between researcher interaction and objectivity, and thus support the validity of the data, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend specific methods for confronting the issue of researcher bias within naturalistic inquiry. This study utilized reflexive journaling as a means for “displaying [sic] the investigator’s mind processes, philosophical position, and bases of decisions about the inquiry” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 109). This journal was used in part to evaluate and evolve research and interview questions, as well as to record the researcher’s thoughts and observations related to the research process. To ensure the validity of the data collected, member checking was utilized both during and after interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as “both formal and informal, and occurring [sic] continuously” (p. 314). This “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 314) is a means by which the participants validate the accuracy of the data collected and the conclusions drawn by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was utilized to evaluate data. As explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985), “content analysis particularly consists of a division of text into units of meaning and a quantification of these units according to certain rules” (p. 337). Peer review was employed as a method to evaluate data unitization. Continual analysis of data by developing and refining categories and subcategories occurred as expected. As Merriam (2009) suggests, “this process of refining and revising” categories continued through completion of the project (p. 183). Negative case analysis, as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the process of “refining working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available” (p. 301), was employed as a strategy to evaluate truth value. Further, peer debriefing was utilized to

evaluate researcher findings and conclusions. Peer debriefing, or seeking an outside point of view from someone who isn't an active part of the study, is another means for supporting truth value (Erlandson, 1993).

### **Reporting of Findings**

Case reporting is utilized for reporting the findings of the study. In *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe three primary arguments supporting the use of case study reporting for naturalistic studies: 1) case reporting provides the “thick description” necessary for “transferability” of conclusions; 2) case reporting is more suitable than scientific reporting in conveying the multiple realities that are a core aspect of the naturalistic paradigm, and; 3) case reporting provides the consumer with a “vicarious experience” of the inquiry process (p. 214). Lincoln and Guba propose that it is the qualitative research consumer rather than the researcher who determines the transferability of a study's findings (Lincoln, 1985). In order for a consumer to determine the extent to which findings may be transferable to another context, the researcher must include a “thick description” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 316) of the context of the study. Thick description entails describing the context so thoroughly that consumers can see how it relates to other contexts, and can therefore determine how the findings can be used (Y. Lincoln, personal communication, September 18, 2012). It is certainly true that thick description of this particular study is vital to transferability of conclusions, and that scientific reporting would be an inadequate means to describe the multiple experiences and realities of the subjects. However, providing a vicarious experience for the reader is perhaps the most important argument for case reporting in this instance. Major gift development is a highly personalized process where development officers and program leaders develop close relationships with the donors. The more

personalized and accessible the findings of this study are, the greater the potential that they will be useful for development officers, and thus impactful for higher education fundraising.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order to make an impact, “research studies must be rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term “trustworthiness” (p. 290) as a synonym for rigor, and explain that trustworthiness is a way to convince “audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (p. 290). They propose that there are four concepts central to trustworthiness: establishing that the findings are true (truth value), determining the extent of applicability outside the context of the study (applicability), determining if the findings can be replicated (consistency), and establishing whether the study is free of researcher bias (neutrality) (Lincoln, 1985, p. 290).

In qualitative methodologies truth value is assessed as credibility (Lincoln, 1985). Prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation are strategies for “increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 301). Erlandson describes prolonged engagement as spending enough time in the context of the study to be able to “think like a native” (D. Erlandson, personal communication, October 16, 2012). Further, prolonged engagement allows the researcher to become a more normalized part of the context and provides the opportunity to build trust (Lincoln, 1985). Persistent observation allows the researcher to discern what is most relevant. Triangulation involves seeking “different sources of the same information” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 305) to confirm credibility. Peer debriefing, or seeking an outside point of view from someone who isn’t an active part of

the study, is another means for supporting truth value (Erlandson, 1993). Member checking, or the process of validating findings and interpretations with the research subjects themselves, further ensures truth value (Lincoln, 1985). Member checks can be conducted at the conclusion of interviews as well as after the study is completed to confirm that the findings “ring true” (D. Erlandson, personal communication, October 16, 2012) with the subjects. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also identify negative case analysis, which is the process of “refining working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available” (p. 301), and referential adequacy, the act of “checking preliminary findings... against archived ‘raw data’” (p. 301), as further strategies to evaluate truth value. In the case of this study, truth value was established by utilizing peer debriefing, member checking and negative case analysis.

Lincoln and Guba propose that applicability in qualitative studies be viewed as transferability (Lincoln, 1985). In contrast to quantitative research, it is the qualitative research consumer rather than the researcher who determines the transferability of a study’s findings (Lincoln, 1985). In order for a consumer to determine the extent to which findings may be transferable to another context, the researcher must include a “thick description” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 316) of the context of the study. Thick description entails describing the context so thoroughly that consumers can see how it relates to other contexts, and can therefore determine how the findings can be used (Y. Lincoln, personal communication, September 18, 2012). Erlandson (1993) includes purposive sampling as a method to support transferability. Purposeful sampling seeks to explore specific cases, and for the purposes of transferability an explanation of the researcher’s sampling method could be viewed as a part



of the thick description. In the case of this study, both purposeful sampling as well a thick description were utilized to provide context for transferability.

Dependability is the measure of consistency proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for qualitative research. They suggest that establishing dependability may not be necessary if credibility has already been established (Lincoln, 1985). Nonetheless, they propose that triangulation could be used as a method to support dependability (Lincoln, 1985). A dependability audit (Erlandson, 1993), or inquiry audit (Lincoln 1985), is another means by which to ensure dependability. Likening the process to a financial audit, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the auditor would examine the process and product of the study. The audit process helps to determine “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). For the purposes of this study, the establishment of credibility through peer debriefing, member checking and negative case analysis was utilized to support the dependability of the study.

Neutrality is assured through confirmability in qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that confirmability can be achieved through the same audit process which addresses dependability. Specifically, the auditor “examines the product – the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations – and attests that it is supported by data and is internally coherent” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 318), which establishes confirmability. A reflexive journal, in which a researcher notes their decision making process, observations and feelings, can also be used to support confirmability (Erlandson, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify reflexive journaling as a means for “displaying [sic] the investigator’s mind processes, philosophical position, and bases of decisions about the inquiry” (p. 109). Rather than striving to eliminate researcher influence in a qualitative study, which Lincoln and Guba

(1985) consider to be an impossible task, a reflexive journal can help to make the researcher's positionality known (E. Gonzalez, personal communication, September, 2012). In this case, confirmability was supported by the use of a reflexive journal throughout the study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter serves to report the findings of the study, which was guided by the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of a potential major gift donor, what motivated them to consider giving to an institution of higher education?
2. How did interactions with major gift development officers affect their decision to give?
3. What were the specific strategies or approaches implemented by major gift development officers which affected their decision to give?
4. Were there factors other than interactions with major gift development officers that affected their decision to give?
5. Ultimately, what were the primary reasons they chose to give, and to give at a certain level?

Results will be reported in three primary categories: why and where donors give, the giving process and factors that influence decision-making. The primary categories, as well as the major themes within each category, are substantiated by excerpts from participant interviews. The interconnectedness of the categories is illustrated by the recurrence of some major themes in multiples categories. In these cases, the same excerpts may be utilized to support multiple themes.

## **Study Participants**

The participants of the study included eleven individuals who were approached to make gifts to the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (CVMBS) by major gift development officers or program leaders, and gave at the level of \$50,000 or higher. Texas A&M University (TAMU) is a Tier 1 research institution that boasted a spring 2015 enrollment of more than 55,800 students at the College Station, Texas campus. More than 2,400 of these students are members of the Corps of Cadets, and TAMU is home to more than 1,000 student organizations. TAMU has more than 436,000 former students. A member of the Association of American Universities, TAMU is comprised of 16 colleges and schools and offers 191 undergraduate majors and 244 graduate degree programs (TAMU, 2015). One of the colleges at TAMU is the CVMBS, the only College of Veterinary Medicine in the state of Texas. The multi-department college features a large animal hospital, small animal hospital, aviary, and exotics program, among other things. It is home to undergraduate, graduate and professional students in a variety of degree-seeking programs. In 2014, CVMBS donors gave nearly \$30 million in current and planned gifts (CVMBS, 2014, p. 20). TAMU works in conjunction with three organizations to facilitate charitable giving: the Texas A&M Foundation, the Association of Former Students, and the 12<sup>th</sup> Man Foundation. These organizations work primarily with major gifts, annual giving and athletic giving, respectively.

The eleven participants in this study included five men and six women. Five of the individuals were graduates of Texas A&M University, and an additional three participants had at least one relative who graduated from Texas A&M University. Three had no alumni affiliation with the university. Total non-athletic giving by these individuals to Texas A&M

University ranged from \$91,000 to \$1,860,000. Largest single gift amounts ranged from \$25,000 to \$1,000,000. Three of the individuals also had athletic giving history, with total per-participant giving to the 12<sup>th</sup> Man Foundation ranging from \$227,000 to \$313,000. Multiple giving structures were represented by the participants and their previous giving, including current giving, endowments and planned giving (bequests). At the time of the interviews, two participants had given one major gift to Texas A&M University, and the remaining nine participants had given more than one major gift to the university.

Participants were interviewed in person in a setting of their choice. Nine of the donors were interviewed at their homes, one was interviewed at the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and one was interviewed at a restaurant. The interview setting did not seem to affect the content or depth of the interview, but in some cases the interviews conducted in participant homes were substantially longer than those conducted in other settings. All participants seemed interested in the research process, and expressed a desire to read the findings upon completion of the study. While some participants were more verbose, no participants seemed to be uncomfortable or unwilling to answer researcher questions. Indeed, participants not only responded thoughtfully and with interest, but also suggested future areas of research related to philanthropy. For all interviews, detailed field notes were taken and later utilized to develop transcripts.

### **Participant Anonymity**

The information provided regarding the study participants is intentional in its brevity. Undoubtedly, there are more stories to tell regarding these eleven individuals than are shared in the previous section or in the findings that follow. Some of the personal stories of the participants that may indeed serve to enlighten the findings have been omitted. Because this

study involves participants from a very specific and limited donor pool – that of major gift donors to the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M – it is the very nature of the personal narratives shared in interviews that could compromise participant anonymity and expose identities. Therefore, the decision was made to err on the side of confidentiality in order to honor the commitment made to participants to maintain confidentiality.

While participant anonymity was prioritized, the importance of contextual observations and the personal nature of narratives in naturalistic study has not been overlooked. Developing a feeling of familiarity with study participants is part of what makes naturalistic methodology so impactful, both for the researcher and the reader. Therefore, major themes and observations noted by the researcher in a reflexive journal will be reported in a non-participant-specific manner in order to convey the impact of the personal nature of participant narratives without compromising anonymity.

### **Researcher Observations**

Extended interviews in personal settings, conversation related to personal experiences, and repeated contact to ensure that the meaning behind participants' words is appropriately conveyed combine to form a sense of intimacy between participants and researcher in naturalistic inquiry. That sense of intimacy is important for several reasons, including developing a level of comfort that allows the participant to share honestly and freely, creating a sense of responsibility in the researcher to honor the participants by reporting accurately and with respect and empathy, and providing a rich context from which the reader can better understand and appreciate the findings of the study. A reflexive journal, in which a researcher notes their decision making process, observations and feelings

(Erlandson, 1993), was developed throughout the study, and proved an important resource for observations about the participants and their narratives. Following are observations of the researcher, reported primarily through excerpts from the reflexive journal.

From the perspective of the researcher, one of the most striking takeaways from the study was the generosity of the participants. This may seem obvious, considering the participants are donors to higher education, but their generosity of spirit was apparent in many other ways. Throughout the interviews, participants proved to be generous with their time, ideas, and personal investment in the study. This was evident by the excitement and eagerness each participant showed when agreeing to and participating in the interviews.

Following the final interview, the following was noted in the researcher's reflexive journal:

I have been surprised and humbled by the genuine interest the participants have taken in this study, and in me. To a fault, each and every one has been excited to be involved, excited to talk to me about their experiences, and excited that someone is asking them. I anticipated a willingness to participate, but not the genuine excitement that they have shown. Even more surprising, they have taking a personal interest in me, the completion of the project and my progress in completing my PhD. They care. They call to check in, and they are excited when I check in with them. They ask mutual acquaintances about how my study is progressing. They are invested, and though I was surprised by this, perhaps I shouldn't be – investing, in causes/organizations/people, is what these donors do.

Participants' genuine interest in the topic of donor behavior was noted throughout the interviews. Participants often suggested areas for further research or made observations about other donors' behavior, as was noted in the following reflexive journal excerpt:

During our interview, [participant name] talked a lot about [other donor]. She made some really good points about his approach to giving, and I was a little surprised that she put that much thought into how he gave. She had some really interesting ideas about how people with different net worths might give differently. She really has a good read on people – at the same time that she identified [donor's] businesslike approach to giving, she also pointed out [other donor's] looser, more gregarious approach to giving and his own personal business development. She made a really good point about how his affability makes him a real asset to the groups he gives his time to.

A second major takeaway was the level of trust the participants' had in the researcher, as evidenced by their comfort with sharing very personal details of the life experiences that shaped their desire to give. This trust was not lost on the researcher, and was noted throughout the reflexive journal, where the researcher detailed feelings of surprise and gratitude that the participants were willing to share so honestly. Many participant narratives detailed familial and personal experiences and feelings. Participants spoke of periods in their lives when they were poor, and the character it developed. They discussed children and parenting, and why they chose to give large parts of their assets to organizations and causes rather than family. They discussed a lack of family, and how that impacted their giving decisions. Regarding the level of participant honesty, the researcher noted:

I continue to be amazed by the trust these donors show me – the honesty and candidness with which they share with me. Perhaps they think they are just sharing fact, but they are sharing emotion, struggle, pain, joy, love – they are giving me access to their very personal stories, and they are beautiful. I could feel the emotion



behind what [participant] shared with me today. I was inspired by it, and could feel her passion and desire to give and support and foster and grow something.

While personal and familial relationships were evident in every narrative, participants also spoke of the impact of the animal relationships in their lives. For many participants, it was experiences with companion animals that directly inspired their gifts to the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Feelings of gratitude for good medical treatment for their animals, as well as the desire to support research related to treatment and elimination of medical conditions proved to be catalysts for giving. For other participants, love and appreciation of non-companion animal species, including livestock and exotics, provided common ground and common interests for them and people involved in the projects they supported. Every participant had either a specific experience regarding animal medical care or a general love of animals that they related to their desire to give to the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

Consistent themes emerged from the personal narratives shared. In some cases, these themes changed the course of future interviews. The following reflexive journal excerpt addresses emergent design in the study:

It has become clear now that the ability to be connected to or involved with the organization is key. Unprompted, three of my first four participants described how important the feeling of inclusion is. [Participant] and [other participant] explained that the good feelings of being included can supersede bad feelings associated with negative previous experiences. I think this has huge implications, and plan to include questions about involvement in future interviews.

Careful data analysis, reflexive journaling and member checking shaped the direction and findings of the study. These findings are reported in the following sections, with special care taken to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

## **Why and Where Donors Give**

### **The Inclination to Give**

All participants in the study indicated that they had already developed an interest in giving prior to becoming connected with Texas A&M University, though three participants had no personal prior giving experience. In describing their inclination to give, participants consistently discussed their feelings about giving and how those might vary from donor to donor. As one participant explained,

Giving is an individual thing. Everyone is different and has different processes. For some people giving is very personal. Some people are very organized and evaluate the purpose of giving. Major foundations have processes that they follow for making gifts, and some individuals have processes that they follow as well. Some individuals embrace giving, and some have difficulty with it. It's an individual process.

Another participant pondered how level of giving may affect an individual's process and approach to giving. "It would be interesting to evaluate the difference in donors at different giving levels," said the participant. "I just wonder about the different levels of thought that go into different levels of gifts."

For three participants, this individual process was related to how giving made them feel. One described giving as "mostly an emotional thing," and another participant discussed the good feelings related to giving and helping. When asked about feelings related to giving, another participant indicated that giving "is a good thing, and I should do more of it." This

desire to do more was echoed by additional participants, one of whom explained that their “biggest regret is that [I] didn’t have more to give.”

**Familial propensity for giving.** In all but one case, a familial propensity for giving was indicated. Three of the participants give as a part of a family foundation, and seven make giving decisions in partnership with their spouse. In the case of three participants, interest in giving was influenced specifically by their parents. One participant indicated that being “raised by a mother with charitable instincts” helped to develop a personal interest in giving. The participant went on to describe how their family foundation was established.

[My middle sister] died in May of 2007, so the assets of her trust went into a private foundation. My youngest sister and I managed it, along with one other person. My interests were so dissimilar from my sister’s that we split the assets and created two foundations.

Similarly, parental giving influenced two additional participants, and in one case a participant described how their interest in giving was spurred by a parental charitable gift.

My dad passed away six years ago last month. In his will he left \$50,000 to [another university]. It wasn’t a surprise, but I didn’t know at that point that my parents had set up a scholarship... Dad’s gift planted the seed that if we wanted to give back, who would we give back to?

Three participants discussed how they approached giving decisions with their spouses. One participant explained that when making giving decisions with their spouse, “The ideas develop together. We communicate very well together. If one of us feels strongly about a project, the other will support it.” Another participant explained that though they had historically made giving decisions together, they and their spouse had recently made a gift

for the first time to a project that they both had an individual passion for. “I wonder how much it plays into [our decision making] when we’re both involved in the same project,” the participant said.

**Modest living.** Familial giving was not the only personal history factor that influenced the participants’ interest in giving. Three participants described modest living as influencing the way they viewed money. One participant explained that they did not “place a high value on jewelry, expensive clothing or cars,” allowing them to utilize disposable income for charitable giving. Another participant explained that they “grew up in very humble means and... started out very humbly.” Another donor further explained this theme of modest beginnings and lifestyle.

We had very humble beginnings as a couple. We lived in married student housing.

[My spouse] made a fifty-cent pot of stew, and we used to go to eat at a place that had a ninety-eight-cent chicken fried steak. I bought a bicycle for \$3.95, and then had to get a basket to carry my books. The basket cost \$4.95, which was more than the bike.

We paid \$55 a month for our apartment in married student housing.

This participant explained the hope that their personal giving might influence similar charitable instincts in those who receive their gifts.

Someday, when they have two coins to rub together and can get by with one, we hope they give the other to help someone else. If you were to apply that principle across the board you would see great benefit.

**Obligation to give.** Several participants viewed giving as an obligation, though not an unpleasant one. For some, this obligation stemmed from a view of surplus assets as an unearned gift. As one participant explained, “The assets were handed to us in a sense because

of [my sister's] premature death.” Another participant framed the same concept in Biblical terms. “When we bought acreage southwest of Fort Worth we got manna from heaven in the form of oil wells. We felt that if you get manna from heaven, you had better give it back.” Giving as a religious obligation was a theme shared by three participants. Two likened their charitable giving to “Biblical tithing.” The third explained their view of giving within one’s means as a moral or religious obligation. “The New Testament talks about sacrificial giving. We don’t sacrifice. But when you receive manna from heaven, our upbringing taught us to give.” The concept of obligatory giving was a recurring theme, with participants utilizing words such as “duty” and “responsibility” to describe their view of charitable giving.

**Giving for benefits and recognition.** Five participants referenced benefits and recognition as having influenced past giving. Three explained that they had made previous gifts to athletic programs in order to receive “benefits like parking” and “to get better seats.” One participant who had given to athletic programs recognized the challenge of incentivizing donors to give to the university when they are motivated by benefits the university cannot provide. “Seating recognition is important,” the participant said, “and it becomes an issue when that benefit competes for money that could be given to other programs.” Other participants explained that “special recognition” impacted a donor’s desire to give. “The [program leader] had more power to entertain us,” said one participant. “That’s why we decided to give to [their project].” While in some cases it seemed that access to entertainment was appreciated simply for the enjoyment of the event, other participants seemed to place more importance on the feelings special entertainment experiences gave them, including feelings of being valued and a sense of being invited into an inner circle.

Another less tangible benefit that was described as influencing the desire to give was social status and maintaining social relationships. Five participants described giving as being influenced by or influencing social networks. One participant explained that they “stayed involved in projects that [my friend] was involved in because she supported projects of mine,” and that it is common to “call on people you’ve supported to support your causes.” Similarly, another participant explained that a friend “was impressed by and pressured by” their spouse’s gift, and was thus motivated to give himself. While these references undoubtedly allude to a certain level of peer pressure, no participants identified this pressure as being overt or explicit. Rather than feeling pressured to make a gift, participants seemed to indicate that they felt inspired to give by the gifts of their friends, or moved to support a friend’s cause because of a close personal friendship.

Despite recognizing benefits that had motivated them or others to give in the past, participants resoundingly indicated that recognition was not of primary importance to them. “Some people like the recognition,” said one participant. “For me, it’s the inclusion and the feeling like we are all on the same team.” Another participant described their reaction to being recognized with naming rights at a new facility.

I’m not big on having my name on things, but supporting the project is important. I didn’t ask for or want naming. It’s not that I need to be anonymous, but I don’t give for naming opportunities. I give to support the whole project.

Another participant shared, “Naming is important to most people. It’s not important to [my spouse], but it was important to [another donor] to recognize his father. Being a part of the Aggie spirit is important.” One participant explained that naming is inconsistent with their view that “charitable giving needs to be benevolent.” Another participant shared that they

considered giving anonymously for similar reasons. While naming may not be a motivating factor for giving for all donors, some participants indicated that it made them feel appreciated. The sense of belonging and being a part of something that many participants indicated was more important than recognition through naming is explored further in other sections of the findings.

**Ability to give.** Regardless of individual inclination, history or incentives for giving, the ability to give was a recurring theme among the participants. Some participants made a direct correlation between the ability to give and an obligation to give. For example, one participant shared their belief that “everyone who has the means to give should give back at the appropriate level to them.” This view was shared by another participant, who explained their belief that “you don’t have to be extremely wealthy to give.” Multiple participants referenced gauging a personal level of comfort related to the amount of giving, with one participant saying,

We had always wanted to give back... and the stock gave us the flexibility to do it.

You have to have a certain amount of disposable income in order to give money away... We need a certain amount of money to live, but we want to give the rest...

Other participants explained that “reasonable financial success” allowed them to give, and if that financial security didn’t exist they “would have to limit their giving.” Another participant described their careful consideration of their ability to give. “I’m careful not to give more than I can afford to give,” the participant said, “and I’m conscious of what I will need to save for retirement.”

Indeed, the ability to give seemed to be the only consistent limiting factor related to the participants’ inclination to give, and participants indicated a desire to give more if their

financial situation allowed for increased giving. One participant explained, “If we had more, we would give it.” Another stated, “Our philosophy is that if we have spare money, we would automatically give it... Giving is something we expect ourselves to do.”

### **Where Donors Give**

Despite a shared inclination to give, participants explained that deciding where to give can be challenging. “Deciding to make the gift was easy” for the participants due to a pre-existing desire to give. However, as one participant explained, “...there are so many good causes. The problem is picking one you want to support. You can’t support them all.” This sentiment was echoed by additional participants, who stated, “We don’t give to all causes,” and, “You must prioritize worthy causes.” Participants discussed many considerations that affect where they give and what they give to.

**Places that make donors feel good.** Donors give to places that make them feel good. This is logical, considering that for many of the participants, the desire to give is related to how it makes them feel. One participant explained that “College Station feels familiar; it feels like home.” Despite not having alumni connections at Texas A&M, another donor described the sense of community that they found in College Station and at the university.

[My spouse and I] are both Texans, and we think it’s the friendliest state in the world, and A&M is like one hundred times more than that... At A&M, everyone within fifty to one hundred miles in on board... People will start up conversations with you at restaurants asking why you are in town... Every person that we meet up with volunteers to want to know us... We felt we were part of a family.

This sense of community and good feelings influencing charitable intentions extends to the ability to connect to people and places. For some, the ability to connect to a place had



to do with a family connection. “I feel a very strong bond to Texas A&M,” explained one participant. “My father went here, and my brother went here.” Further, the type of institution can affect a donor’s ability to relate, as discussed by one participant who “liked the idea of giving to a state school rather than a private school.” For others, the ability to be connected to a new network of people was important. As one participant stated, “We like being around educated people.”

The ability to personally relate to individuals was impactful for some participants. Indeed, decisions about where and how to give were in some cases directly related to the participants’ ability to relate to the experiences of those who were benefitting from their gifts.

I wanted to be able to help the average student... I try to put myself in the student’s place. I like for the student to know that there is a person behind the gift, not some obscure millionaire, but someone who was once in their place.

In this instance, the participant seemed to not only have an interest in supporting a student who had a similar educational path, but also in supporting a student with whom they shared similar characteristics.

I didn’t want the scholarship to just be for the 4.0 student. Sometimes, the more average student is actually a better practitioner... I wanted to help people that were like me... I gave where I gave because it accomplished my goal of giving and I could relate to the students pursuing veterinary school.

For another participant, the interest in giving to students they could relate to stemmed from the desire to help students avoid some of the financial hardships they themselves experienced during school.

When I was a student I hitchhiked home. Students then didn't have cars or much money. We weren't snake poor, but I had a mom, dad and two brothers at home.

Money wasn't an easy commodity to come by. One year before Christmas, I had a nickel to buy a can of Coke, and I saved it to buy a Coke for hitchhiking home, but when I put it in the machine, no Coke came out. I didn't have dispensable income.

When giving scholarships to kids today, some really need it.

**Places where donors had good experiences.** Donors have a desire to give back to places and causes where they have had good experiences. Certainly, "personal experience" frequently informs donor decisions about where to give. For some participants, the desire to give back was fueled by positive experiences as a student. "I give here because I came here," stated one participant. "It's nothing against other schools in the state." Positive personal experiences as a student inspire loyalty giving by alumni. "In my day there was great loyalty to A&M, a great culture of giving back to A&M," explained one participant. This sentiment was echoed by another participant, who stated, "We're just of that generation where we feel loyal to A&M." For another participant, it was both personal experience and experiences of family members that cemented a positive connection to Texas A&M. "[My daughter] graduated in 1993," the participant said. "I always used A&M for various things, and my brother graduated from A&M." "We love Texas A&M," said one participant. "Our daughter went there." This participant later described how their personal history and experience impacted their view of the university, and helped to develop a loyalty to the institution that would later impact giving.

My mother and dad grew up in the Depression. There were five girls and two boys.

The boys went to college and the girls worked to support them through college. When

my uncle got his senior boots it felt like they belonged to the whole family. I'm real proud to see the picture of my uncle at Texas A&M.

Conversely, negative student experiences can have the opposite impact on the desire to give back. One participant explained how negative experience affects their giving choices.

...the experiences you have will impact future giving. For example, I will never give to [a particular college] because I had a crappy undergraduate experience. I won't support the [major] scholarship because it's the only class I ever failed.

Positive experiences for non-alumni can be equally impactful when it comes to making giving decisions. One participant described the experiences with Texas A&M veterinarians that led them to the decision to give to Texas A&M University.

The commitment and the empathy of the veterinarians in care of our animals was amazing... If we hadn't had the good experience with the vets that cared for our animals, we wouldn't have done it. That started it... We're almost paying A&M back for the treatment that our animals received from A&M vets.

Similar personal experience impacted another participant's desire to give to Texas A&M University.

We had a lot of intimate experience with A&M because of our dog... He passed out in Austin, and we took him to an emergency vet. He came to and seemed fine. We later took him to A&M for another issue and mentioned the episode to the vet. He recommended that the cardiologist take a look, and the EKG looked ok, but he said a lot of times the EKGs don't tell the whole story. So he sent us home with a monitor that was like a 24-hour EKG. When he called with the results they found a syndrome that required a pacemaker. Our first boxer died early. He probably had the same issue,

but we didn't have the same technology. We were so grateful and impressed that the A&M vet encouraged us to find out what was going on. He showed great care, concern and professionalism. We were so impressed with A&M and the response of all of the doctors... We were open to a big gift because our experience was so great. In one case, a participant referenced the effects of positive experiences of others at Texas A&M, explaining that the university "has given all of these families, all of these people... something. And now, they are happy to give back."

**Causes that inspire passion.** Donors give to places or causes that connect with a personal passion. As one participant explained, the ability to connect to a personal passion "is the difference between loyalty or responsibility giving and cause-related giving." Causes that connected to the passions of participants in the study included education, scholarships, animal welfare and medicine, human medicine, and species-specific projects, among others. One participant explained the circumstances that connected their desire to give with a project they were passionate about.

We weren't excited about giving strictly to animals. [A former administrator] suggested the chair, which also benefitted humans. It was a chair in comparative oncology... Cancer touched both of our lives. Both of our fathers had cancer... Comparative oncology was perfect because it's important to give to help the animal kingdom, but we also wanted to help mankind.

In another case, it was the personal experience of a participant that connected them to a cause they became passionate about – the desire to move animal medicine forward. "When we gave to the imaging center, a lot of that interest was because we had a horse that could have benefitted from that imaging," explained the participant. Another participant felt a similar

desire to bridge a gap in funding for a cause that was important to them. “We love horses,” the participant explained. “I feel like someone has to support what the school doesn’t.” For another participant, the cause that inspired passion related to their desire to make an impact. “I asked myself where I could make the most difference in someone’s life... To me, education makes the biggest difference,” stated the participant. “Education gives people financial security.” Similarly, another participant explained that giving “to scholarships [can] help make someone’s struggles a little less.”

Alternatively, cause-related giving can also serve to alleviate a donor’s concerns about circumstances in their own lives. “Another big thing at A&M that pulled us in was the Stevenson Center. We don’t have to worry about our pets outliving us.” Participants emphasized that both the cause and the organization have to be a good fit for the donor. “It has to be both,” stated one participant. “I would never give to the University of Texas. For this gift, two of my loves came together.”

**Places that do good work.** Donors give to organizations and people that they trust to do good work. For some, this relates to an appreciation for institutional accomplishments. “We are overwhelmed by the educational process of A&M overall,” shared one participant. For others, confidence in the institution was related to an ability to see results.

It’s relatively easy to give to Texas A&M as an alum. It’s even easier when coupled with a project that you can see... At the time, my wife ran the scholarship office. I had the opportunity to see tangible results.

The same participant cautioned that confidence in an institution is something that needs to be constantly earned, and that organizations should not rest on their laurels. “There are plenty of worthy causes. That’s the danger of an organization that doesn’t change.” When

a level of trust is established, donors may be more willing to make gifts with few restrictions. Because of the confidence individuals inspired “we give to [specific program leaders],” shared one participant. “Our most recent gift to the college was for the Dean’s discretionary fund,” leaving use of the funds up to the preference of the college leadership.

**Places that align with belief systems.** Donors give to organizations that align with their personal belief system. Indeed, even when hesitant to give to a particular type of institution, donors may give if they feel that a specific institution supports their values. As one participant explained,

We’re hesitant to give to higher education because of political environments.

Supporting organizations that are liberally based is kind of like screwing yourself because you are supporting people who will vote against you and your interests.

The same participant expounded that when additional factors align, such as passion for a cause, a donor may be influenced to give to a type of organization that they do not typically support. “A&M is a more conservative school,” the participant stated, “and we have an interest in giving to horse projects.”

In summary, the participants in the study all had a propensity to give prior to becoming connected with giving possibilities at Texas A&M University. This inclination to give was influenced by multiple factors, including emotions, family, personal economic history, a sense of obligation, religious beliefs, benefits and recognition, social networks, and the ability to give. Donors must make giving decisions based on personal priorities. The participants indicated that they tend to give to organizations that make them feel good, places where they have to opportunity to connect with or relate to people or an institution, places where they had good experiences, causes that connect to a personal passion, people and

organizations they trust, and organizations that align with their belief systems. While all of these factors were echoed by multiple participants and were reported as important, the opportunity to connect with an institution and to people that they trust seemed to be particularly impactful.

### **The Giving Process**

The generally accepted approach to major gift development is a multi-step process. This process involves the identification of individuals who may have the capacity and/or propensity to give. Following identification, prospective donors are cultivated through relationship building. Next, the development officer will solicit a charitable gift, proposing to the prospective donor that they make a donation to the institution. Typically, the ask is accompanied by specific information related to the amount of the proposed gift and what it will support. If the gift is secured, the development officer moves into the final stage of the major gift development process: stewardship. Stewardship may include working to fulfill any deliverables that the institution is responsible for, including specific benefits or recognition included in a gift agreement with the donor. Stewardship also involves continuing to foster the relationship the development officer has built with the donor, and may be viewed as follow up.

Though the development officer may have a clear understanding of their process for major gift development, the prospective donor likely does not. This section of the findings will report participant experiences and observations that relate specifically to the major gift development process.

## **Identification**

As one might expect, the identification portion of the major gift development process was not as pertinent or impactful to the participants as other portions of the development process. Indeed, though the development officer may be spending time and effort working to identify a particular prospect, the participant does not truly begin their experience in the major gift development process until first contact is made. As such, from the participant perspective the part of the major gift development process that development officers view as identification is perhaps more appropriately viewed in terms of how the participant became connected to a development officer or the institution.

In some cases, participants indicated that they were the ones who initiated contact with the university. One participant explained that they contacted a particular development officer because “her contact information was at the bottom of the letter I received about the class scholarship.” Similarly, another participant shared that their contact with the university began when their spouse “expressed to one of the doctors that we would be interested in helping in some way, and somehow that got passed on, because then we heard from [a development officer].” In the experience of other participants, they became connected to the university through acquaintances or third parties. “We became aware of the projects at Texas A&M through personal relationships with [the program leader] and [an administrator],” explained one participant. In another giving experience, the same participant “got connected to [a development officer] through our vet.”

## **Relationship Building**

The portion of the major gift development process referred to as relationship building by development officers was perhaps the most impactful for the participants. Specifically, the



importance of relationships was discussed as a vital factor in giving by seven of the participants. One participant explained that the ability to build a relationship with an organization was important, describing it as being akin to a friendship that is enhanced by “getting together periodically, visiting and gaining access to things.” Another participant explained that “the personal factor is very important,” and that “confidence, history and relationships are important factors” when making giving decisions. In fact, among multiple factors, one participant stated that “personal relationships are the most important.” This sentiment was echoed by yet another participant, who explained that giving is “mostly about a personal connection.” One participant explained that building a strong relationship with a donor is important because “once we make a decision to give and develop a relationship with that organization, we try to continue giving there.”

**The right individual.** While the ability to build a relationship was identified as being important, many participants emphasized that the ability to build a relationship with the right individual was vital. One participant explained that before deciding to give to a project, even if it is within an area that is important to them, “the right people have to be involved.” When donors are connected to the right individuals, the giving process becomes easier. One participant explained that a particular development officer “really helped me figure out how to give... If you are giving, you don’t want it to be a hassle. If it had been hard to give, I wouldn’t have given.” Another participant stated “relationships with the staff make [the giving process] easy... They can help guide you in the parameters of what you’re interested in.” Another participant further echoed this sentiment, stating that the development officer they worked with “has been instrumental in helping” them with the giving process. One

participant described the connection they developed with a development officer during the giving process.

In several ways, this is really personal. We all really liked [the development officer].

I've talked to some development officers that I never want to talk to again, though not at A&M... The personality is important, and their passion for the subject is important.

That was clear with [this development officer]. [They] gave us connection and trust.

Another participant described a similar connection to a program leader, stating, "...we have a common love of horses, and [they are] so personable and genuine... with the other development officers we didn't have common interests."

Participants emphasized that the giving experience might have been different if the individual they were connected to wasn't able to build a relationship with them. "I don't think it would have been the same with [the other development officers]. I don't know how you match [the right people] up." Another participant felt similarly, stating, "I don't know that it would have been the same experience if we hadn't gotten [this development officer]." One participant expressed concern regarding the high amount of turnover among development officers connected to the university.

At the [college] it's like a revolving door in the development office. They are a bunch of twits. That sort of turnover hurts the giving process because you don't have time to build a relationship... [It takes] two to three years [to build a relationship]."

The same participant described characteristics they felt were vital yet often lacking in development officers. When asked what they felt was important for a successful development officer, the participant stated, "At least a minimal level of interpersonal skills. The ability to follow up on promises in a reasonable amount of time."

According to the participants, the most important factor in relationship building is the ability to develop trust. “It’s very much about personal relationships and trust, and it’s about relationships and trust going beyond the gift,” stated one participant. Another participant explained that as trust develops with an individual, confidence in projects grows. “When the personal connection isn’t there, the specifics of the project have to be higher. As the personal relationship grows, you don’t need as many specifics.” Indeed, the same participant explained that the ability to build a personal relationship is important specifically because it allows the development officer or program leader to establish trustworthiness. “You know the difference between [a negative interaction] and a true relationship,” the participant explained. When asked how they discern whether a relationship is trustworthy or not, another participant stated that “you just know if it’s genuine. You can feel it.”

**Connection to program or cause.** Among the factors that affect a donor’s ability to develop confidence in an individual is that individual’s level of connection to what they are fundraising for. “Their level of connection to the program [is important]... Bringing an engineer to an equine project won’t work. Bringing an [agriculture] person to the Corps [of Cadets] won’t work” explained one participant. The participant further explained that a development officer’s lack of content knowledge would hurt their ability to be successful. Another participant felt that lack of personal connection to a program would hinder a development officer’s ability to effectively raise funds because it would be more difficult to build meaningful relationships with donors. “How can you [as a donor] connect with someone who has no passion or interest in what they are fundraising for? ... If a development officer doesn’t believe in the mission, and isn’t excited about it, it just kind of stops the connection.”

**Donor education.** If a donor is connected to an individual with whom they develop trust and confidence, that individual has the opportunity to impact the donor's decision making by educating them about areas of need, levels of giving, and opportunities for structuring a gift. As one participant explained, "The relationship was important to develop knowledge of the project." Another participant described how impactful a particular development officer was in helping them decide how to structure their gift.

We knew we wanted to give a scholarship, but we didn't know how it worked... [Our development officer] knew what we wanted to do, and guided us through the process.

[They were] our guide, even when we didn't know the right questions to ask...

[They] helped us understand how it pays out.

Another participant described the impact of an educational tour that a development officer arranged for them while they were making decisions about what program to give to. "The tour was unbelievable. We had zero expectations or experience with what we were going to see." This particular donor was so impacted by the experience of learning more about the institution, they felt it important that other potential donors be similarly educated.

Once a person decides to give, they need to see everything about the whole school with an emphasis on the area they care about... You need to introduce people to what their money is going to, because it is such an intangible thing.

Another participant described how being provided options by a development officer helped them to identify the program they decided to give to:

We wanted to know what the school needed. By the time we made the decision to give, we had all met [the development officer] and liked her a great deal, but we also had confidence in what she was sharing with us. The decision was not whether to

support, it was how. [The development officer] had several suggestions, and this was the one that appealed the most.

This participant emphasized the importance of the development officer getting to know the potential donor's areas of interest before making funding area suggestions. "[The development officer] met us first" in order to develop an understanding of interests, "and then prepared a list of suggested funding areas." One participant felt strongly that better education of potential donors could have a great impact on fundraising.

I think the University should send letters to alumni ten to twenty years after graduation about what the different giving options are, because I didn't know the options. I think more people would give if they knew they could direct their gift [to a specific program or use]... They ought to send information like the Spirit magazine to people who haven't given a major gift yet. They can use publications to inform people about what is going on, and it might trigger a desire to give... [Providing anecdotal information about giving] would give more ways for potential donors to relate. It makes giving seem more realistic for people who are ordinary. It makes giving seem more accessible.

Another participant agreed that a donor "could be provided with additional ideas" for giving "that might spark an interest."

In addition to exposing potential donors to possible funding areas, donor education by development officers or program leaders can also impact how donors choose to structure their gifts. One participant described how impactful a particular development officer was in helping them decide how to structure their gift. "We knew we wanted to give a scholarship, but we didn't know how it worked... [Development officer] helped us understand how it

pays out.” Another participant relied on a development officer to determine “how much an endowed scholarship would need in order to start generating money.” The same participant continued by explaining, “Then I asked how much I would need to give to support a scholarship that could be given immediately.” Similarly, one participant described how a development officer helped them understand options for gift structuring in order to reach their goal for desired impact and outcome of giving.

Our scholarship was \$25,000 endowed. [The development officer] said it would be available in a year. She helped us understand how to give a little more so it could be available to students sooner. She also helped us figure out how to put money in to cover the fee. That was important so that the scholarship could kick in as fast as possible.

Even when the participant had a clear concept of how they wanted to give, communication with a development officer helped to translate their desired giving concept into reality. “It was pretty easy,” explained one participant, “I asked if I could give a gift of stock, and how I could divide it up among multiple students. I discussed the possibilities with [the development officer, and] she wrote up a gift agreement.”

In some cases, working with a development officer not only helped participants reach their giving goals, but also exposed them to giving options they had not previously considered. For example, one participant described the desire to give at a particular level, and how communication with a development officer about structuring that gift gave them a greater level of comfort.

We had talked about wanting to do something, but the idea of a chair seemed far-fetched. As we talked more we became more comfortable. When we found out that

we could pay over several years, it was a little easier. Taking one million dollars out of saving was a lot... The changes in the [tax] law made the gift more reasonable.

Our comfort level with giving at that level increased.

A better understanding of how to structure gifts over time can also increase a donor's level of comfort with giving by providing assurance that they will not be approached for another gift for a specific period of time.

You can structure your gifts in a way that discourages people from making another ask. For example, if I spread a gift out over five years, they won't make another ask until that gift is done. [That may be important because of] the size of the gift. That may be all the donor is capable of giving for a period of time.

In another instance, a participant explained that during the course of a relationship with a program leader, they were exposed to options for giving that were not traditional current giving or cash gifts. "I think the way this gift came about is a good example of giving what you can and looking for creative ways to give. It may be talent or time that you give."

### **The Ask**

Overall, the participants did not identify the portion of the major gift development process known as the ask as being impactful in their giving experience. Unprompted, not one of the eleven participants talked about being asked for a gift when describing their giving experience at Texas A&M University. Only when prompted by researcher questions did participants consider how they had been asked for a gift. Many felt that they made the decision to give without being asked. One participant felt this process was best described as having developed a relationship, learned about a project, and then decided to give. When asked if someone specifically approached them about a gift, the participant said, "No, it

evolved out of a relationship.” Another participant felt similarly, describing how the decision to give developed after first being a part of the project.

You have to have a project and people that you believe in, and the ability to be involved as part of the team. I was asked to be a part first, and I asked to give later because I have seen the reality of the project and the hard work and success. I had to be a part of that. It was a very positive experience.

Other participants identified strategies that were utilized by Texas A&M University to encourage donors to give. “We were never asked for money,” stated one participant. “They shared information about what we could support and what the needs were if we felt like we would like to give.” Another participant became aware of university needs through a mailer. “I wasn’t solicited – I called [the development officer] because I received a letter about support for an endowed scholarship in the name of my class,” the participant said. Another participant praised individuals Texas A&M for the methods used to approach donors. “They’re not afraid to ask, but it’s not a cold call. They identify people with the capability and make them feel like they are part of a team.” In some cases, participants felt it was important for the university to ask for gifts. One participant encouraged the university to “appeal to former students without begging.”

Whether or not the ask is the most memorable part of the giving experience, upon reflection participants did report that it is impactful. When asked how they decide what causes to support, at least one participant included “the way you are approached” as a factor. Indeed, once participants considered the ask, many were able to identify examples of solicitations that they were not comfortable with. Multiple participants identified cold calling as an unfavorable method of soliciting donors. “I am leery about cold call solicitations,” said



one participant. Another explained that their foundation doesn't accept "unsolicited gift requests." Other participants described feelings of being "handled," causing the donor to "want to write a check and walk away." These situations might result in short-term success for the solicitor, but as one participant explained, "They may get the gift once, but they won't get it again."

### **Stewardship**

The stewardship phase of the major gift development process seemed to impact the participants as much as relationship building, with eight of the participants discussing follow up from the recipient organization after a gift had been made. Whether positive or negative, experiences post-gift have the capacity to make a lasting impression on donors. One participant described their view of interactions after giving as follows:

There is an ongoing relationship. The good ones keep you engaged. The bad ones take the gift and don't show up for five years. [The thank you] is critical. It validates that you made the right decision to give to the organization.

Put simply by another participant, "hearing genuine thanks from the faculty [helps me see how my gift is impactful]." Yet another participant stated, "It's good to know that the gift is appreciated. Thank yous are important..."

While the importance of a simple "thank you" was clear, several participants identified specific ways that development officers or organizations have helped them feel connected after making a gift. As one participant explained, "They treat you nicely when you give here. They seem appreciative, and that matters. They send you the magazine from the Foundation and they invite you to dinners." Another participant stated, "After we funded the chair, they made a plaque, and we've been recognized several times. We were published in

the Association of Former Students magazine.” For some participants, special experiences or involvement in events helped them to feel recognized and appreciated for their gift.

We had some special experiences with [a specific organization], and they sent us a photo book. We toured an aircraft carrier with [that organization], and we were the first people to ride at the Reagan Ranch.

Another participant described how their development officer played a primary role in keeping them involved at the university after giving. “[Our development officer] has a lot to do with that,” they stated. “We receive updates, information on considerations for the chair. She lets me know what’s going on and invites us to things, tours.” Indeed, stewardship may be viewed as a continuation of the relationships that were developed in earlier phases of the major gift development process. One participant discussed stewardship as occurring “through our personal relationships. [The program leader] or [the dean] or [the program coordinator] will call, or we can call them.”

Negative experiences post-giving leave a lasting impression with donors, and may affect future giving to the organization. Five participants described post-giving experiences that left them with a negative impression of the organization. For one participant, lack of communication regarding the way their gift was being used led to a feeling of discontent. “There’s been a bit of a disconnect after agreeing to the gift for the endowed chair. Our understanding was they were going to go hire a renowned [specialist], but that didn’t happen. [The current chairholder] was on staff.” Lack of communication impacted another participant in a negative manner. They explained, “With our past university giving, the school went in a different direction and the school stopped reaching out after our daughter graduated.” For

another, basic follow up to help the participant capitalize on the tax benefits of their charitable gift was not realized.

I have given some gifts before to [a non-profit organization]. Our neighbor was a board member. I never heard back from them. I have to call them every year for a letter for my accountant. They seem disorganized. It's important for a charity to take care of business and think of the tax credits for their donors.

In each of these cases, a lack of follow up caused participants to feel disconnected and disappointed with the giving experience. One participant helped to frame why helping a donor feel good about the experience post-giving is so important. "If you enjoy the relationship," they explained, "you are more likely to give again."

### **Factors that Influence Decision Making**

Most giving decisions are based on how the donor feels. As one donor explains, "At the end of the day, all giving is probably affected by whether it makes you feel good, from the initial idea, to the process to the result." Participants reported that there are multiple factors that affect a donor's feelings about the giving process, including past experience, program leadership, program knowledge, passion for the project, gift impact, strategic vision and belief in the project, ability to direct gifts, ability to be involved, stewardship of the gift and tangible project results.

### **Impact of Past Experiences**

In cases where participants were considering a gift to an organization with which they had previous giving experience, how they felt about that previous experience was an influential factor affecting decisions about future gifts to that organization. Participants referenced positive past experiences, with most prior giving experiences at Texas A&M

falling into this category. When asked about giving to Texas A&M, one participant explained, “My interactions with [a specific program] have been very positive. It’s a joy to work with the staff... [The giving experience at Texas A&M] has been very positive.” Another participant said that their positive experiences giving at Texas A&M has them “looking for the next level of involvement.” Yet another participant discussed how their positive experience has impacted their giving. “Our experience was enhanced by getting to know the people in the projects – the researchers. That has been pretty instrumental in our giving process.”

While positive past experience has an impact in future giving, negative past experience perhaps leaves a more lasting impression for donors, as evidenced by the multiple examples of negative experiences that several participants discussed. In some cases, negative experiences were related to interactions with individuals during the giving process. When asked whether they had any negative experiences or interactions when giving to Texas A&M, one participant stated, “Yes, but [those individuals] have since been reassigned or left... I don’t suffer fools. I have a low tolerance level for zero interpersonal skills and for people who bring little value to conversation and the world.” This participant also pointed up that poor follow up can leave a lasting negative impression. “A thank you in a form letter is terrible. This is an oversight of buffoons.” Another participant described multiple negative previous giving experiences.

Giving to a previous university left a bad taste in our mouth. We lost the personal connection and then lost the ability to find out if the gift was being used in the way we wanted... We gave for several years to a local senior home, but nothing is happening. They still haven’t broken ground... There is one place that we give where

they are unprofessional, and they haven't honored our request for anonymity. As a result we are getting calls from people who shouldn't have our name. They brought in a company to oversee their fundraising, and they are blowing the personal relationship.

Whether it be negative interactions with individuals, poor follow up, loss of communication, lack of progress, or failure to respect donor wishes, past negative experiences impact future giving in a negative manner. As one participant explained, "Bad experiences made us want to focus on organizations that we know." Another participant echoed this sentiment. When asked how a donor continues to give when faced with negative interactions, the participant stated, "You don't. You shift causes."

### **Ability to Build Relationships**

As discussed in the section of the findings addressing the relationship building portion of the major gift development process, the ability for a donor to establish personal relationships is a key factor influencing giving decisions. One participant explained that "confidence, history and relationships are important factors" when making giving decisions. In fact, among multiple factors, one participant stated that "personal relationships are the most important." This sentiment was echoed by another participant, who identified personal relationships as the most important factor guiding their giving decision-making.

### **Program Leadership**

Confidence in programmatic leadership has a positive impact on a donor's likelihood to give. As one participant explained, "The project leaders were catalysts. Believing they could be successful with the project was a big part [of my decision to give]." Project leadership can inspire confidence that a project will be successful or has a likelihood of being

fully funded. One participant described why they felt confident supporting a particular program at Texas A&M.

[The project leader] put together a great team, and he treats everyone with respect. He treats everyone like they are important... He's comfortable talking to people. He's very patient. He will talk for years to a prospect... [He] understands people. I have confidence in [him]. He knows who to talk to and when, and he always treats you special after giving a gift.

This participant explained that project leaders are important factors in their decision making related to giving, and that other donors to the same project made similar giving decisions because of their confidence in program leadership.

Donors will hold program leadership accountable for project or personnel failure. One participant explained that prior program leadership prevented them from giving to a specific project. However, when new leadership was installed, the participant regained confidence in giving to the program. That same participant explained that they saw a clear distinction between program leaders and development officers. "Bad individuals come down to individuals and leadership... Good leaders won't tolerate bad development officers," explained one participant, "Leaders should provide training or make a change if there is a problem with development officers." Indeed, multiple participants pointed to program leadership as the reason that communication failures occurred. "I think part of the problem [with communication about the use of our gift] was that there was a change in the leadership in [an administrator] position," explained another participant.

## **Program Knowledge**

Donor decision-making is positively impacted by increased knowledge of the program. Participants indicated that being provided specific program details by program leadership aided their decisions about giving. One participant explained that how educated a donor is about a particular program will impact whether and how much they give. “Specifics about how much the project needs and how the gift will be used are important,” the participant stated. Because of their intimate knowledge of project details, program leaders can be particularly effective fundraisers, or can positively impact giving if incorporated in the development process. One participant described the confidence that a program leader inspires by sharing project details with donors.

As a donor, I need specific details, plans, numbers and results of what is happening.

[The project leader] even shares specifics about his salary that is paid through an endowed chair. He is the best fundraiser I have ever seen.

Another participant described the impact of learning more about the program they were being asked to support. “One of the first things that blew our minds was getting a behind-the-scenes tour of the vet school. Now we want to be a part of the process of making education better for the students.” For another participant, it was behind-the-scenes knowledge of the development process itself that inspired them to become more involved as donors. “We have served on the Development Council for many years. Knowing the insides and what our development officers do has been very impactful for us as donors.”

## **Passion for the Project**

As already alluded to in the section of the findings reporting where donors give, donor decision-making is impacted by the level of passion they have for a particular project.

Having a passion for a project “is the difference between loyalty or responsibility giving and cause-related giving,” and tends to inspire increased excitement for a project and an increased level of comfort with giving. One participant explained the circumstances that connected their desire to give with a project they were passionate about.

We weren’t excited about giving strictly to animals. [An administrator] suggested the chair, which also benefitted humans. It was a chair in comparative oncology...

Cancer touched both of our lives. Both of our fathers had cancer... Comparative oncology was perfect because it’s important to give to help the animal kingdom, but we also wanted to help mankind.

One participant spoke of topics that touched a personal passion as “loves,” and described how when those loves came together, making the decision to give became easy. Another participant described the importance of passion related to level of giving.

It’s important that you have a passion for the project... I might support a project that a friend is passionate about a little. I might support the project more if it is something that I am personally excited about.

Yet another participant described how their personal passion was the driving force in deciding to make a gift, stating, “I am passionate about education, so I supported it through scholarships.”

### **Gift Impact**

Both the desire to make an impact and the ability to see the impact of a gift affect donor decision-making. Multiple participants discussed why the ability to make an impact is important to them, and ways in which they are able to see that impact. “We don’t want to



meddle,” stated one participant. “We want to make an impact.” When asked why on participant prefers to give locally, they explained:

When I give to scholarships I can meet the kids and see the impact of the gift...

Anytime you give a gift you are sacrificing something else. Seeing the impact helps to validate the purpose of the gift... Being able to see the direct impact helps to ensure the gift was used as intended.

Another participant described their desire to make an immediate impact through their giving.

So many places solicit you over the phone or in the mail for little gifts. I would rather give a large gift to make an impact. I like to see the change that comes about because of my gift. I was looking to give a major gift and see immediate impact... I wanted to give money to make an impact now.

This same participant went on to describe how the ability to make an impact affected both the size of the gift and the organization to which they gave. When discussing deciding where to give, the participant said, “A large gift to a place like Texas A&M has the potential to make a greater impact.” Indeed, the perceived or intended impact of a gift can affect how much the donor decides to give, where they decide to give, and what program they decide to give to. One participant stated, “When research helps mankind, you feel like your gift has done what it is supposed to do.” Other participants felt similarly, with one explaining the perceived impact of their gift as follows:

I can’t imagine anything more gratifying than the impact research breakthroughs will have on human life. There are children living to adulthood now with glioblastomas because of this research... Parents won’t give the brain of a child who died from cancer to research, but we can research dogs’ brains, because they have the same kind

of cancer and respond similarly to treatment. That is the sort of impact our gift can have.

Yet another participant described that the ability to have an impact is important because they “like to see that the gift has afforded an opportunity to someone who maybe wouldn’t have had the opportunity otherwise.”

Participants also explained various ways that they are able to see the impact their gifts make, including meeting students who have received scholarships they funded and faculty whose programs they have supported. “It’s exciting to meet the people whose programs your gift supports,” one participant said. “They were so appreciative.” In some cases, the organization can facilitate the opportunity to see or understand gift impact. “The San Antonio A&M Club scholarship committee helped me to see how scholarships impact students,” stated one participant. This same participant pointed to multiple avenues that allowed them to see gift impact at Texas A&M University.

Events like the scholarship luncheon that was held today help me to see how my gift is impactful. I received scholarships as a student, but didn’t meet the donor. As a donor, I wanted to meet the students to see that the gift is really making a difference... Information from [development officers] also helps me see how my gift is making an impact.

### **Strategic Vision and Belief in Project**

Donors’ willingness to give to a specific program is affected by the program’s strategic vision and the donor’s belief in that vision. As one participant explained, “developing a belief in the project and then seeing the success and results is a really good thing.” Another participant described the importance of a strategic vision for a project when

they consider a donation. “Thoughtful decisions that are planned out are important. There has to be a vision that keeps the best interests of the organization in mind.” A clear programmatic vision gives donors confidence that the program has a direction, that the end goal is achievable, and that their gift will be used in the way they intended. When describing how they decide what projects to support, one donor described the importance of belief in a project as follows:

Whether it’s something you believe in, and whether you believe in the end objectives... We have a love for Texas A&M, and we believe in the project... I believed in the value of the project and I believed in the project and its ability to be successful... belief in the project was the most important thing... You can find a project to be interesting, but you have to develop a belief in the project.

In some cases, the ability to see the strategic vision might be the factor that convinces a donor who is on the fence to give to a project. When considering a gift to Texas A&M, one participant explained that “getting to know [development officer], seeing the vision – that made [our gift] a slam dunk. The school was doing so much forward-looking.” Ultimately, this participant stated, “We wanted to be involved in something we believe in.”

Conversely, when there is a change in programmatic vision that causes a project to no longer align with donor beliefs, giving is likely to decrease. “We will give elsewhere if the organization has a belief system that is different than ours,” explained one participant. “We started to disagree with the project and how it was managed,” stated another participant when describing a situation where programmatic direction shifted. “When the organization quits meeting our personal needs, we give elsewhere.” Another participant described feelings of disappointment with a program to which they donated.

It could be disappointment with the organization as much as the process that makes a donor feel bad. For example, [one organization we gave to] abandoned a cool project that we believed in. This caused us to be highly disappointed in the organization. Another participant described a situation where the ultimate use of their gift was not in keeping with the original intent.

For several years we felt we didn't have a real complete understanding of how the gift was being used... At the time we gave the gift I'm not sure we would have done it if we weren't going to be funding an alliance with [another center] through [hiring a specific position]... I felt maybe the objectives had changed, and I still don't know what the direction is... We just feel that the original objective was not being fulfilled. Some donor concerns about a change in programmatic direction or a change in the use of a gift might be alleviated through improved communication. "If there was a change in direction," this participant shared, "we should be advised."

### **Ability to Direct Gift**

For many participants, the ability to make decisions about gift structure, level and use are important ways to alleviate concerns about gift misuse or drift from the original intent of the gift. When giving to institutions that may not align with donor belief systems, one participant explained why "the ability to direct the gift is key."

We're hesitant to give to higher education because of the political environments.

Supporting organizations that are liberally based is kind of like screwing yourself because you are supporting people who will vote against you and your interests. Any gifts we make to higher education have to be directed."

Another participant explained how the ability to direct a gift can affect a donor's level of comfort with giving. "The more specific you can be with directing the gift and the more control we have over the gift, the more comfortable we are with giving." Another participant stated, "I like to know exactly what my gift is going to."

### **Ability to be Involved**

Overwhelmingly, participants reported that the ability to be involved in a program or project was an important factor in their giving decision-making. All participants in the study have become or remained involved with the university, college or specific program after making a gift. Indeed, participants cited the ability to stay connected after giving as a key consideration in decision-making. In some cases, participants made the decision to give after becoming involved in a project. "We really want a strong connection," stated one participant. When asked to describe the process of giving to Texas A&M, follow up after giving and positive parts of the giving experience, one participant reported the following:

This gift was different because [my wife] was very involved in the project from the start... I was highly involved in the project in both cases [of giving at Texas A&M]... Getting to know the people involved, thinking and strategizing [were the positive parts of my giving experience]... I'm pretty specific about what I want to give to. I want to be involved in the projects and know the objectives.

Another participant explained how involvement was a key factor in their decision to give to Texas A&M. When asked how important it was to them to feel a part of the program they give to, the participant stated, "It's very important. It's probably why I picked Texas A&M over [another institution] for my gift." For one participant, it was previous involvement in a project that spurred the decision to give.

You can't be part of a committee and watch everyone else work so hard and not do your part... I like to be personally involved with the project... I like to be part of the committee, or part of the team... [When I have a bad experience somewhere] it makes me want to cross them off my list. But sometimes I still give because I feel like a part of the organization. [Feeling like a part of the project] is the A #1 most important thing. When [the project leader] asked me to be involved I wanted to say no. I was trying to let go of some obligations and enjoy my grandchildren. But I had the opportunity to be a part of the team. I stayed involved in projects where I felt I was part of the team... You have to have a project and people that you believe in, and the ability to be involved as part of the team. I was asked to be a part first, and I asked to give later because I have seen the reality of the project and the hard work and success. I had to be a part of that. It was a very positive experience.

Another participant described their opportunity to be involved and the importance of feeling valued beyond their ability to give. "We were asked to be on the Development Committee," the participant said. "I enjoyed feeling included and like it wasn't all about our money."

Another participant reported feeling included after making a gift to Texas A&M, stating, "They kept everyone involved, even after construction was completed." Still another participant explained, "We have served on the Development Council for many years.

Knowing the insides and what our development officers do has been very impactful for us as donors. The more involved we are, the more we become aware of the accomplishments and the needs."

One participant described making the decision to support a program as being similar to beginning a relationship. As such, the opportunity for continued involvement was critical in their decision-making.

When you have someone giving who believes in it, you're really asking someone to partner and participate. Being a part of it is important. We feel a part of what the vet school is doing. We don't receive special privileges, but we're a part of their work, and that's exciting... If it's important enough for us to want to support, we want that connection. We want to give money to things we can be a part of over time, including getting other people involved. We're not interested in writing a check and going away.

The same participant went on to clarify that they are interested in being a part of the team, but they don't expect to be a decision-maker for the program.

I have a point of clarification. I knew a donor that wanted to stay involved, but in more of a negative sense. She was inserting herself in hiring decisions. I don't mean that I want to be involved at a program or administration level... Being a donor doesn't give me the right to make program decisions. I want to be a supporter.

Feeling a part of it is important so that I can be an ambassador.

Another participant felt similarly about the ability to be involved in a program, but not as a decision-maker, explaining that they "don't want to meddle." Another participant stated, "We don't want to provide so many directives for the gift that it becomes ineffective."

For other participants, the ability to be connected to the program after giving offered them a sense of community. One participant described what their involvement meant to them as follows:

We felt we were part of a family... There are so many choices of what you can be involved in. There are so many opportunities to be involved at any level you want... As we get older, our friendship circle shrinks. A&M gives us the opportunity to expand that circle.

In addition to being involved on committees, participants described other activities that helped them feel involved in projects that they give to. “We went to a mentor group... with students,” said one participant. “We will also get to be privy to the architectural renderings.” For another participant, feeling involved comes down to communication. They explained that if they received more information, they “would feel more involved.”

Ultimately, a donor’s level of giving may be greatly impacted by the level to which they are involved in a project. “That’s true for every area someone might be interested in,” said one participant. “If they are not that involved, they are probably not going to give.” Another participant confirmed this concept, stating, “Had I not been involved, we wouldn’t have given there.”

### **Good Resource Stewardship**

More than half of the participants identified stewardship of resources as being an important factor in their giving decision-making. A lack of confidence in the organization’s accountability and resource stewardship may negatively impact giving. In contrast, confidence in an organization’s stewardship of funds may enhance a donor’s desire and willingness to give. One participant described how feelings about accountability affected their giving decisions.

[My spouse] has had some very bad giving experiences. One was a client that was a very large nonprofit. People in the nonprofit didn’t see accountability as their job. It



left a bad taste in his mouth. He felt as if there was a lot of waste... Accountability, waste and stewardship are very important factors for us... We have confidence in the way A&M used their funds.

This sense of confidence in Texas A&M's use of gifted funds was shared by other participants, with one stating that in the particular project they supported, "There is not a lot of waste and fluff." Another expressed confidence in leadership at Texas A&M, saying, "They work hard to disseminate funds responsibly."

Of particular concern to some participants was the percentage of gifts that go to administrative costs rather than to causes. One participant felt "that administrative costs may be higher with small gifts." This same participant continued to say, "At many organizations where you get mailers requesting small gifts, I don't think donors understand how high the administrative costs of these gifts are." Another participant discussed administrative costs and use of funds at length, stating:

The worst fundraising is when people ask for money and then don't tell you how they use it... I don't like to give to [a particular organization] because I don't know the administrative overhead. I don't know how much of the gift actually goes to the cause... I like to know exactly how the gift is being used. I find that to be satisfying. I don't want to throw money to the wind... I prefer not to have high overhead and administrative costs for the projects that I support... It is important to know how much of the gift goes to administrative costs.

Multiple participants felt similarly, with one summarizing by saying that "direct impact and lack of waste" impact the decision to give.

## **Tangible Project Results**

The ability to see the results of a project affects donors' satisfaction with their gift, and thus their likelihood of giving to the same organization or project in the future. When asked about factors that are important to giving decision-making, one participant cited results as a key element. While this particular participant had reservations about giving to universities, the ability to see tangible results was key because they could "see where the money went." Another participant felt similarly, stating, "Making a difference is important, but without a contact we wouldn't know what the results are."

The ability to see project results gives donors confidence about the use of their gift, and can also provide a sense of accomplishment and excitement. "Going by and seeing that [huge] building," said one participant, "is the most impressive thing ever." Another participant explained how results make them feel like they share a part of the project's success. "Everyone wants to be associated with a winner," said the participant. "For me, it's an honor to be a part... I like to receive progress reports... I want to see results." This desire for feeling a sense of accomplishment and success as a donor was shared by another participant, who stated, "The fact that you can see the project come alive and that the results are tangible and real is very exciting as a donor."

## **Summary**

In summary, this chapter detailed how participant experiences informed the following major categories from a donor perspective: why and where donors give, the giving process and factors that influence decision making. The data analysis summarized the findings into subcategories, many of which were related to multiple major categories. The questions that guided the study were: From the perspective of a potential major gift donor, what motivated

them to consider giving to an institution of higher education? How did interactions with major gift development officers affect their decision to give? What were the specific strategies or approaches implemented by major gift development officers that affected their decision to give? Were there factors other than interactions with major gift development officers that affected their decision to give? Ultimately, what were the primary reasons they chose to give, and to give at a certain level? The final chapter will speak in greater depth to how the findings address the research questions, as well as explore implications for future research.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

Many traditional funding sources for higher education, such as state funding, are decreasing. As such, the importance of philanthropic support for higher education is increasing. Major gift development is the most cost effective method of fundraising (Weinstein, 2009, p. 131). University foundations and development officers have a well-established process for approaching major gift development that is not founded in theory. There is little available research that addresses the effectiveness of the major gift development process, and none that addresses the process from the perspective of the donor. Therefore, this study was designed to determine what factors are most influential in the decision-making process of donors to higher education, and ultimately whether the major gift development process implemented by university major gift development officers is effective. In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the findings as they relate to each of the research questions that guided this study, the limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Content analysis was utilized to evaluate data collected through interviews in this study. As explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985), “content analysis particularly consists of a division of text into units of meaning and a quantification of these units according to certain rules” (p. 337). Continual analysis of data by developing and refining categories and subcategories occurred, and resulted in reporting of major findings in the following major

categories: why and where donors give, the giving process and factors that influence decision making.

Within the first major category, findings were separated into two subcategories: the inclination to give and where donors give. The study found that factors including a familial propensity for giving, self-reported modest living, feeling an obligation to give, giving for benefits or recognition and the ability to give all supported the participants' inclination to give. Relevant to the second subcategory, the study found that donors give to places that make them feel good, places where they had good experiences, causes they feel passionate about, places that they feel do good work, and places that align with their belief systems. The second major category addressed participant observations and feelings related to the giving process. This category was divided into four subcategories: identification, relationship building, the ask and stewardship. The ability to connect with the right individual, that individual's connection to the program or cause, and the ability to be educated by that individual were identified as key components of relationship building.

The final major category reported factors that participants identified as being factors that influence donor decision-making. Such factors included the impact of positive and negative past experiences, the ability to build relationships, program leadership, program knowledge, passion for the project, gift impact, strategic vision and belief in project, the ability of the donor to direct their gift, the opportunity for the donor to be involved, good resource stewardship, and tangible project results.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study that may impact future strategies for major gift development in the university setting. Indeed, this study

represents the most comprehensive look at university major gift development effectiveness to date. In this section, I will discuss how the findings address each of the research questions that guided the study.

### **Findings: Research Question One**

Research question one asked, from the perspective of a potential major gift donor, what motivated them to consider giving to an institution of higher education. Information reported in the first major category of the findings addressed factors that motivate donors to give to an institution of higher education. Participants in the study were influenced to give by many factors. These included factors relevant to their family history, upbringing and individual values, such as exposure to giving through family and personal value placed on adopting or maintaining a modest lifestyle. Participants' desire to give was also informed by religious tenets in some cases. Participants were also motivated to give by a feeling of obligation, and reported consistently that giving was limited only by individual capacity for giving responsibly while maintaining the ability to meet other financial obligations such as retirement. While most participants didn't identify themselves as being motivated by recognition and benefits provided by the institution receiving the gift, some participants did indicate that such benefits were motivating factors for other donors.

The most salient conclusion relative to this research question was that all participants in the study had a pre-existing inclination to give. Stated differently, while interactions with development officers or program leaders may have affected what program they gave to, or at what level they gave, these interactions did not convince the participants to give. The decision to give had already been reached independently of these interactions by every participant in the study. The implications of this conclusion for university major gift

development are impactful. If donors have made the decision to give prior to being contacted by a development officer, it stands to reason that development officer contact may not be influential in causing an individual who does not have a pre-existing inclination to give to make the decision to give. In other words, it is likely that no number of visits by a development officer will convince an individual who is not predisposed to giving to give. Major gift development officers would therefore be better served to spend more time identifying individuals who already have the propensity to give than to focus their energy on making multiple contacts with prospects who don't have a predisposition to giving, as may be encouraged by the current system of metrics for evaluating development officer productivity. If the current system of metrics is not a true measure of development officer effectiveness, it stands to reason that an alternative and more suitable method of evaluating development officer performance should be explored.

### **Findings: Research Question Two**

The second research question asked participants how interactions with major gift development officers affected their decision to give. While interactions with major gift development officers may not have affected participants' decisions to give, they certainly impacted whether gifts were made to specific programs and at what level the gifts were made. Information reported in the relationship building subcategory of the second major category of findings spoke to the important role the development officers and program leaders play in major gift development, and how donors view this relationship. Participants emphasized that being able to connect to an individual with whom they had common interests and the ability to build trust was of primary importance. Participants identified personality, likability and trustworthiness as factors that impact a donor's ability to build a

lasting and personal relationship with an individual. Whether with a development officer or program leader, a personal connection is vital. Without a personal connection, donors are unlikely to give to a program or project. Participant's also reported that an individual's connection to the program in need of support is important. Donors are more likely to connect with an individual who is passionate about the program for which they are raising money. Donors are also more likely to connect with individuals who can provide them with detailed information about the program seeking support. Participants indicated that if a connection to the right individual is made, that individual has great potential to influence how and at what level the donor gives through educating the donor about areas of greatest need and ways to structure a gift to meet both program needs and donor desires.

The implications of these findings further support that metrics are not an effective way to measure a development officer's productivity or likelihood of being successful. No amount of visits will help a donor connect to someone who is not the right fit for them. No number of contacts will cause a person to develop trust in someone of whom they are distrustful. Therefore, development officers should be encouraged to quickly recognize whether they have a personal connection with a potential donor, or whether that donor relationship would be fostered more effectively by another individual. Incentives such as shared recognition for prospect development that are already in place could be further emphasized to support this strategy. The more quickly a potential donor is introduced to an individual with whom they connect personally and can develop trust, the sooner a gift is likely to be realized by the institution.



### **Findings: Research Question Three**

The third research question asked whether there were specific strategies or approaches implemented by major gift development officers which affected their decision to give. Beyond the ability to connect with a donor and develop a personal and trusting relationship, the findings indicated that development officers were most likely to influence donor giving through education. Therefore, once a relationship is established, results would suggest that the majority of development officer efforts should be placed on providing the donor with clear information about potential funding areas, areas of greatest need, and strategies for structuring gifts in order to achieve maximum impact. Indeed, participants reported that information provided by development officers or program leaders affected their decisions regarding what programs to give to and at what level they might give to achieve the intended impact more quickly.

### **Findings: Research Question Four**

The fourth research questions asked whether there were factors other than interactions with major gift development officers that affected their decision to give. Multiple factors other than interactions with major gift development officers were reported to affect donor decision-making. These factors were primarily reported in the third major category of findings, and included positive and negative past experiences, program leadership, program knowledge, passion for the project, gift impact, strategic vision and belief in project, the ability of the donor to direct their gift, the opportunity for the donor to be involved, good resource stewardship, and tangible project results. Of these factors, those that seemed to be most influential included the impact of past experiences, impact of the gift, belief in the

project and in project leadership, and the opportunity for the donor to be involved beyond making the gift.

The results suggest that the opportunity to be involved and to feel that they are a part of the project has the most powerful influence on donor decision-making other than personal relationships. Indeed, feeling that they are a part of a project may even influence donors to give in spite of past negative experiences. Being intimately involved in a project affords the donor the opportunity to develop knowledge of and confidence in programmatic goals and vision, relationships with and trust in program leadership, as well as insight into the potential impact of their gift. Personal commitment to a project also results in a greater likelihood of additional gifts from a donor. Therefore, the findings suggest that programs would be well-served to incorporate prospective donors into committees, planning sessions or in an advisory capacity for specific projects or programs.

#### **Findings: Research Question Five**

The fifth research question asked what, ultimately, were the primary reasons they chose to give, and to give at a certain level. The second subcategory of the first major section of findings reports information that indicates why donors choose to give to specific places or programs. The findings report that donors give to places that make them feel good, places where they had good experiences, causes they feel passionate about, places that they feel do good work, and places that align with their belief systems. Perhaps most importantly, the findings suggest that the most influential factor relevant to gift size is the ability to make the desired impact. This means that donors are more likely to consider a larger gift or a different method of structuring their giving if they believe it has the potential to make a greater impact, or to have the desired impact more quickly.

## **Overview & Summary**

Ultimately, the findings indicate that donors choose to give, and perhaps more importantly, choose to give repeatedly, when the giving process makes them feel good. These good feelings are associated both with the process of relationship building and with gift impact and follow up post-giving. This would suggest that a development officer or organization's efforts to keep the donor connected must extend beyond the point at which the gift is made. Though stewardship post-giving is already recognized as an important part of the major gift development process, the findings of this study lend greater weight to its import as it is the part of the process the donor is left with, and thus most likely to influence final feelings about their giving experience.

## **Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

While this study provides a previously nonexistent foundation of information relevant to the motivations and decision-making factors of donors to higher education from the perspective of the donor, it should be considered just that: a foundation from which to continue exploration of philanthropic giving to higher education. Much of the relatively sparse literature available that can inform this topic comes from the empirical paradigm, making it necessary for the consumer to determine in what context that information is applicable, and what questions it actually answers. There is a clear need for additional naturalistic study of factors that clearly impact philanthropy, including relationships, experiences, feelings, and motivations, among others. I suggest that many of the questions explored through empirical study in the reviewed literature be revisited through the naturalistic paradigm. Naturalistic inquiry is better equipped to provide a meaningful foundation of theory related to philanthropic giving, professional development and donors.

In the case of this study, both study limitations and conclusions warrant further research. Naturalistic inquiry is characterized in part by idiographic interpretation and tentative application, concepts which are closely related. They refer to the tendency to interpret data “in terms of the particulars of the case” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 42) and the hesitancy to make broad generalizations based on findings. While the context free nature of empirical study has long been credited with validity because of its generalizability across contexts, it is the context itself that gives data meaning in naturalistic inquiry. Without context, the data cannot be understood, and consumers of the findings cannot make reasonable decisions regarding to which contexts findings can reasonably be applied. And, indeed, broad generalization of the findings of this study may be limited by its context.

First, it must be acknowledged that the participants in this study were limited to donors to a specific college at Texas A&M University, as described in Chapter 4. Therefore, the potential exists for a different set of motivating factors for donors who give to other colleges. Likewise, donors to other universities may be motivated by a different set of factors and approach decision-making differently. Further, while the findings indicate that the ability to connect with the right individual is a crucial factor for the donor in the giving process, it must be acknowledged that all participants in this study ultimately made a gift to the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University. This begs the question of what the giving process is like for donors who are not connected with the right individual, and may ultimately not make a gift to the college. On top of this, the context is further limited by the fact that Texas operates under joint property laws, which undoubtedly impacts the independence with which donors with spouses can approach the giving process.

Therefore, it is suggested that future research on the topic of higher education donor decision making include similar studies with participants from multiple colleges at Texas A&M University, studies with participants from multiple similar institutions and studies with participants from differing institutions. Studies that include institutions within the state of Texas, as well as institutions from states with differing marital property laws, should be undertaken. Additionally, in light of the changing and contested view of higher education as a public good, a comparison of donors to public institutions versus donors to private institutions is warranted as a way to explore whether perceptions of higher education as a public versus private good affects giving patterns.

Further, the findings of this study open myriad possibilities for additional study. It is recommended that future study explore how donors of differing giving levels approach decision-making. Future studies should also focus on the decision-making of a population of donors who have made multiple gifts to the same institution to determine what factors encourage repeat giving. Additionally, future studies should explore, from a donor's perspective, how donors might be influenced to give to projects that do not connect with a personal passion. As previously stated in this section, it is highly recommended that many of the questions addressed by empirical study in the literature review be revisited with naturalistic methodologies in order to develop more meaningful and impactful data to address philanthropic giving, professional development and donors.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The implications of this study may have the potential to make university major gift development more effective by concentrating development officer efforts on the factors that have the most potential to affect donor decision-making. Modifying major gift development

officer evaluation relevant to their productivity and effectiveness to reflect efforts central to donor decision-making could have far-reaching positive impacts on university development efforts. Further, moving away from strategies or evaluation tools that are reported to be ineffective could make major give development efforts more efficient and effective.

It is recommended that the evaluation of major gift development officer effectiveness be modified to reflect some of the major findings of this study. Specifically, the findings support that an individual who is likely to give a major gift has a pre-existing propensity for giving. This suggests that an individual without such a propensity to give is unlikely to be converted to a donor regardless of the cultivation efforts that are employed by a major gift development officer. Therefore, an evaluation tool that rewards development officers for spending less time cultivating individuals who will remain non-donors should be developed. This tool may reward more effective identification, or it may reward the ability for development officers to recognize an individual's propensity, not just ability, to give early in the cultivation process. The development of a truly effective tool to evaluate the effectiveness of major gift development officers must likely be based in further study.

While the evaluation and inherent motivation of development officers is intrinsically tied to the effectiveness of major gift development, it is perhaps not the most vital aspect of recommendations for the practice of major gift development in the university setting. Because of the overarching issue of decreasing state funding and thus need for increased philanthropic funding of higher education, the ability to raise money to address existing program needs must be addressed. It is highly recommended that university foundations work closely with program administrators to determine their areas of greatest need, whether they be new programming or supporting existing program by bridging funding gaps. Then,

major gift development officers must be encouraged to focus on fundraising for the programmatic needs as prioritized by the administrators. Major gift development officers should utilize the better understanding of major gift donors development in this study, as well as future studies, to help motivate donors to give to the areas of greatest need. This may be accomplished by seeking donors whose interests align with these areas, or by encouraging donors to focus on their ability to make an impact. Either way, focusing on the factors that make donors inclined to give to a particular program has the potential to help major gift development officers more effective in not just raising funds, but in raising funds that address the most vital programmatic needs.

Once again, however, fundraising focused on programmatic needs ties back into major gift development officer evaluation. Working to connect donors to specific existing programming needs may not always be the fastest or easiest method for securing donations, because many donors tend to prefer to support new “conspicuous and name-able things” over operating budgets which support existing programs (Dad, 2011). As such, the evaluation of major gift development officers must be examined to ensure that it encourages fundraising for prioritized programmatic needs, or at a minimum does not discourage it by prioritizing dollars raised over intended use of those dollars.

Ultimately, the great importance that participants placed on the long term, personal relationships that they establish with development officers and program leaders indicates that there may be systemic problems with the process by which development officers are hired, trained and evaluated. This may be particularly true in the case of young and inexperienced development officers who have neither the life experience necessary to connect with much of the donor base on a personal level, nor the professional experience to understand that their

profession operates under a system of metric evaluation that does not necessarily reflect their aptitude for major gift development. Without appropriate mentorship and training, young development officers may not be encouraged to develop the vital interpersonal skills that are necessary for long term relationship building, as well as the stewardship of these relationships post gift. A system that solely rewards based on dollars raised or contacts made is ill equipped to evaluate or encourage the development of the intangible skills necessary to be an effective development professional.

### **Relationship of Results to Theory**

The conceptual framework of this study centered on philanthropic research informed by theories in multiple fields, including economics, psychology and sociology. A single theory was not chosen with which to frame this study because a single theory could not fully address the multiple possible motivational factors relative to philanthropy in higher education. Indeed, the findings of this study supported the use of a conceptual framework constructed of multiple theories.

Concepts of giving as volunteerism and altruism addressed by Drezner (2011), Bremner (1994) and Bies (2012) were supported by participants who reported a desire to give for the betterment of mankind, or for improved opportunities for individuals. The idea that “giving decisions are often guided by social norms and rules” (Powell, 2006, p. 576,) was supported by participants’ reporting of giving being influenced by their social connections and networks. Further, Frumkin’s (2002) assertion that individuals are driven “to enact their values, faith and commitments through work, prayer, philanthropy and volunteerism” (p. 96) was supported by findings that indicated a propensity to give based on individual values or religious beliefs.



Participants also reported giving as influenced by factors that were self serving or not purely altruistic. These factors included benefits provided by the institution receiving the gift, such as special access, recognition or unique experiences. Further, the findings suggested that most participants' giving was influenced by the good feelings they gained from the process, both because of the relationships built and because of impact their gifts made. This supports contentions by Drezner (2011) that philanthropy is not free of self-serving motivations, as well as his relation of giving to social exchange theory. Indeed, Piliavin and Charng's (1990) assertion that "anything that appears to be motivated by a concern for someone else's needs will, under closer scrutiny, prove to have ulterior selfish motives" (p. 28) was supported by findings that indicated donors gave to modify circumstances that they or their animals had once experienced, or that giving was motivated by the good feelings it elicited within the donor.

The concept of venture philanthropy discussed by Drezner (2011) was well-supported by the findings. Drezner (2011) suggested that venture philanthropists evaluate the impact, or return, that they can expect from their gift, or investment. The findings of this study certainly indicated that donors evaluated the impact of their gift when making decisions regarding what program to give to, and at what level to give. Further, the reported importance of being involved in a program during and after the giving process supports both venture philanthropy concepts and social exchange theory.

Overall, the findings speak to the significance of multiple theories and concepts relative to philanthropic giving, including altruism, volunteerism, and social exchange theory. The variety of possible motivational factors that drive charitable giving, as well as the fact that many seemingly conflicting motivational factors may exist simultaneously, call for

the development of a theory of philanthropy which allows for the coexistence of multiple motivational factors that fall along a spectrum from altruistic to self-serving.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, this study attempted to explore the effectiveness of the major gift development process at institutions of higher education by examining said process from the perspective of the donor. Philanthropy is recognized as a key source of alternative funding for academic programs that are increasingly “expected to find their own sources of financial support or to supplement institutional support” (Elliott, 2006, p. 5). The effectiveness of major gift development from the donor perspective is not addressed in current literature, and this study aimed to bridge that knowledge gap. Results of this study indicate that donors to higher education have a pre-existing inclination to give, view the ability to develop personal relationships based on trust as a vital prerequisite to giving, can be influenced by information and education by development officers, are more likely to give if they have the opportunity to be personally involved in the program, and are ultimately influenced by how the total process makes them feel. While the context of this study may limit its generalization, the potential impact of the findings warrant further studies which explore a variety of contexts.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- Tell me about your involvement in philanthropy or charitable giving.
- What has influenced your decision making in terms of where you chose to donate?
- Tell me about the process of giving to Texas A&M University.
- What made you become interested in giving to Texas A&M University?
- Did you approach Texas A&M regarding giving, or did someone at Texas A&M approach you?
- What factors were influential in your decision making regarding giving to Texas A&M University?
- How did you decide what you wanted your gift to support?
- How did you decide how you wanted to structure your gift?
- How did you decide the amount of your gift?
- Did your feelings about the amount or purpose of your gift change from the time you decided to give to Texas A&M to the time when you finalized your gift?
  - If so, what factors affected your feelings about your gift?
- Were there individuals who were influential in your giving process?
- In what ways did interactions with Texas A&M representatives affect your giving decisions?
- Did you interact with development officers as a part of your giving process at Texas A&M?
- How did you feel about your interactions with development officers at Texas A&M?

- Did your interactions with development officers affect your plan for giving to Texas A&M?
- What were the most positive experiences associated with your giving process at Texas A&M?
- Were there any negative experiences associated with your giving process at Texas A&M?
- What factors most influenced your final decision regarding the size and structure of your gift to Texas A&M?
- Since making your first gift to Texas A&M, have you had regular interactions with university personnel?
- Since making your first gift to Texas A&M, have you had regular interactions with development officers?
- Have your interactions with development officers or other university personnel led to you making any additional gifts to Texas A&M?
- Given what you have described, how would you describe your overall giving experience at Texas A&M?

## APPENDIX B

### A DONOR BILL OF RIGHTS

# A DONOR BILL OF RIGHTS

#### DEVELOPED BY:



Association of Fundraising  
Professionals (AFP)



Association for Healthcare  
Philanthropy (AHP)



Council for Advancement and  
Support of Education (CASE)



Giving Institute: Leading  
Consultants to Non-Profits

**PHILANTHROPY** is based on voluntary action for the common good. It is a tradition of giving and sharing that is primary to the quality of life. To assure that philanthropy merits the respect and trust of the general public, and that donors and prospective donors can have full confidence in the not-for-profit organizations and causes they are asked to support, we declare that all donors have these rights:

#### I

To be informed of the organization's mission, of the way the organization intends to use donated resources, and of its capacity to use donations effectively for their intended purposes.

#### II

To be informed of the identity of those serving on the organization's governing board, and to expect the board to exercise prudent judgment in its stewardship responsibilities.

#### III

To have access to the organization's most recent financial statements.

#### IV

To be assured their gifts will be used for the purposes for which they were given.

#### V

To receive appropriate acknowledgement and recognition.

#### VI

To be assured that information about their donations is handled with respect and with confidentiality to the extent provided by law.

#### VII

To expect that all relationships with individuals representing organizations of interest to the donor will be professional in nature.

#### VIII

To be informed whether those seeking donations are volunteers, employees of the organization or hired solicitors.

#### IX

To have the opportunity for their names to be deleted from mailing lists that an organization may intend to share.

#### X

To feel free to ask questions when making a donation and to receive prompt, truthful and forthright answers.